Interview with Robert A. Stevenson

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR ROBERT A. STEVENSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Mr. Ambassador, please give a little bit of your background before you came into the Foreign Service, so we know where you're coming from.

STEVENSON: Certainly. I graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1938, with a B.S. in Commerce degree and a major in foreign trade, and then moved up to western New York, where my family was living then, near Buffalo, and went to work first for Remington Rand, then after a year or so, for the National Gypsum Company.

While I was working for the National Gypsum Company in their Industrial Sales Division, I felt I had to get into World War II. So I applied for and received a commission as an ensign in the Navy Supply Corps and served in the Navy, in the Pacific theater, until after the war. Then I took the Foreign Service exam, the special exam that was given for military men. I took it in New York City in 1945 with about 150 others, at a writing desk with just a writing arm to write on, and I just failed it. So I was discouraged, but not completely discouraged. I felt if I had had time to bone up for it and had had better writing facilities, I could have passed it.

So I stayed on in the Navy as a regular officer and was sent to Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla; took the exam in December of 1946, passed it, and then came in the

Foreign Service class of September 2, 1947. Our last member in that class on active duty was George Vest, who recently retired from the position of Director General.

After the usual introductory training here at Washington, I was assigned to Embassy San Jos#, Costa Rica, my first post. I will say that the Foreign Service, in those years, was sort of the “O. Henry Foreign Service”, as he portrayed it in his story, “Cabbage and Things.” A couple of clerks looked after you in the Foreign Service Institute, in terms of your travel and plans, and you pretty much had to make your own arrangements to travel by ship. I went down to San Jos#, Costa Rica, to the port of Golfito, on a United Fruit Co. banana boat from New Orleans with my wife and two small girls and a cocker spaniel.

The experience in San Jos# was, indeed, very interesting because I got a variety of work. I started out in the economic section and did the economic reporting, and then did labor reporting and was the first person to make contact with Luis Alberto Monge [Alvarez], who at about age 22 was the director of the Catholic Labor Union and later, of course, President of Costa Rica in recent times.

Then I was assigned to the Consular office and had experience doing consular work there. The area was full of flotsam and jetsam left over from World War II, interesting characters, I must say. Of course, while I was there in 1948, Pepe [Jos#] Figueres started his revolution, successful, and threw out a government that was about to be taken over by the communists. There's not much doubt about this point in my mind, having personally heard the communist deputy chortling over the loud speaker system about how the Congress had annulled the elections and the Colderon Guardia elements were about to take over. But Figueres started his revolution and it was successful. I heard more shooting then than I ever did in World War II.

Q: What was the situation there? Was the embassy a bystander involved in this? What were we doing?

STEVENSON: The embassy, (in my innocence as a brand-new 3rd secretary and vice consul) I thought was not involved, but LTC Jimmy Hughes, who was our Army attach#, disappeared for four or five days and we learned later that he'd been giving military advice to Figueres. So in that sense, there was certainly some informal involvement. Our ambassador was Nathaniel P. Davis, a very sharp pro who had been a prisoner of war in the Philippines under the Japanese. I remember how my friend, Given Parsons, and I shook our heads and had our eyes opened when we were told not to worry about Jimmy Hughes. (Chuckles) And we didn't. Figueres' victory was very popular, no doubt about it. He had the overwhelming support of the people of the country.

When the government fled, there were three days of anarchy in the city, with small groups of what we called mariachis, young country boys from Guanacaste, who had been armed by the Picado government with .44-caliber Remingtons, single-shot Remington rifles with a soft-lead bullet as big as your thumb, and they marched around the town after the government had left, and fired these guns from time to time. Our embassy then was on the third floor of the Hotel Costa Rica.

I remember such a threesome coming down the street just at noontime as I was leaving to drive home for lunch. I thought better of it, finally, and turned back and went into the office and up the stairs to the third floor. As I went in, I heard a shot. They told me later that the bullet hit the window just below the ambassador's office and chipped bits of concrete onto the people who were looking out. I thought it was a good thing I went back, because when I came from lunch, there were blood stains all over the sidewalk across the street where some of these fellows had shot a poor guy through the stomach.

Figueres won, and then later, contrary to most Latin American victors in revolutions, he turned the government over to Otilio Ulate, who had been elected in the election in Feb, 1948.

Q: It's really stuck since then, hasn't it?

STEVENSON: Yes. Democracy has stuck there. Yes.

Q: Did you have any contact or any feel about the communist group that was trying to take over at the time?

STEVENSON: I wasn't doing political work then. Of course, I was brand new. But Manuel Mora was the communist leader down there, and was a very powerful communist leader and a member of the Congress. I can still remember him speaking to the Congress, because they carried in on loudspeakers. I heard his speech, as I say, when he was chortling about how the Congress had annulled the election and they weren't going to let the reactionaries take over the country. The Communists were supporting former President, Dr. Rafael A#gel Colderon Guardia, whose son, incidentally, is the current President.

Of course, Figures, who took over, was not a reactionary. He was very much a Latin American New Dealer type, and was determined to give the country a new structure, more interest in the little man and so forth. That's the line that his party has taken ever since. But the communists fled. When the government fled, the communists fled.

Our house then was right across from the airport, and my wife heard a commotion over at the airport. She went out to the front gate, and this DC-3 was down there with its engines revving. A jeep rushed out on the field, and a man got out and began firing at the DC-3, which thereupon went to full throttle and took off. That was the plane in which Carmen Lira, a communist schoolteacher, who had been Mora's teacher, and Manuel Mora left on and got away. I believe, in later years, Mora was allowed to come back and live quietly, and never caused any more problem. Carmen Lira died abroad.

As I say, in San Jos#, there were then many “Characters.” One of the most unforgettable characters I met was Alex Asser Cohen, who had been there for 20, 25 years and all through World War II as a member of the Embassy staff. We always thought of him as

a real diamond in the rough. He was born in Amsterdam, Holland about 1900 and ran away to sea at age 13. He was the political officer when I got down there. He had been a clerk for the military attach# for many years, and had gotten acquainted with all of the Germans in Central America, so they had assigned him to the State Department office that was watching Germans in Central America. I learned a lot from Alex. He'd been around there a long time and was an expert in many things. Ambassador Bob Woodward wrote a little memorial about him that came out in the DACOR Bulletin about a year or two ago. They finally got him transferred out of San Jos#, and he was on his way through Washington to Manila, I believe, and was sitting in on an ARA staff meeting. I've forgotten who was Assistant Secretary then. Questions came up about the situation in Costa Rica, and everyone turned to Alex who had all the answers. The Assistant Secretary said, “Who is that man?”

They said, “Well, that's Alex Cohen. He's been in San Jos# a long time.”

He said, “What's happening to him now?”

They said, “He's going to Manila.”

He said, “No, send him back to San Jos#.” So he was sent back to San Jos# and finished his career down there, which was as he wished.

There were many other characters, Jimmy Angel and several other old pilots, gold miners, sailors, tuna and shark boat owners, G.I. Bill veterans, etc. Alex, incidentally, was a world authority on Mozart and had some first folios of Mozart. He was the first person to have a hi-fi in San Jos#, the cabinet made from an old Honduran mahogany bank counter. He was a world-known stamp collector. He was a world-known orchid grower. These were all sidelines. He retired to Gainesville, Florida. I'm sorry to say he died about two or three years ago.

Costa Rica was a very interesting post to get started at. Then much to my chagrin, I was assigned to Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Q: Why to your chagrin?

STEVENSON: Well, I thought that I should go to another Embassy. I had been doing consular work and I wanted to get back into political work. I thought, well, if I go to Guayaquil, it will be just consular work and a hot, tropical port. It turned out to be quite an interesting experience.

Q: I might say, for the dates, you were in San Jos# from '47 to '50, and from Guayaquil from '50 to '52.

STEVENSON: 1950 to '52. Right. Guayaquil was still the old Foreign Service. I can remember getting two messages in Brown Code, and I had to go to the vault and dig out Brown Code books and look up the words in the books. That was pretty far back. I used to put on a white suit every morning and white shoes, and I did feel like an O. Henry vice consul. In San Jos# and Guayaquil we still kept the “Miscellaneous Records Book.” They contained many weird and interesting entries. For example, Miss Mary Byrd of Cartago, C.R., (who used to ride her horse side saddle to the Embassy residence July 4th party) a cousin of Admiral Byrd, came to me and asked me to record her will. She was then in her 90's. I copied it into the Miscellaneous Record Book. I wonder whatever happened to these old books.

Q: Guayaquil was known as the white man's grave or something. Thomas Nast died there.

STEVENSON: Yes. Yellow fever was a real scourge. People from Quito, before the control of mosquitoes, used to hate to come through Guayaquil because they ran the risk of getting yellow fever in passage. Then an earthquake, I think in '42, killed one of our vice consuls and his wife, when the building collapsed.

We found it an interesting post. One of the junior officers there was Pete Vaky, who later became Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs. I don't know if you have him on your list or not.

Q: He's on our list.

STEVENSON: Then after Guayaquil, two years there, I was sent over to—

Q: In Guayaquil, did you get involved in any political situations there at the time?

STEVENSON: Velasco Ibarra was running again, the perennial candidate. I must say when I think back and remember the people I met in Latin America who later became president of their country, it was a fair number—or Presidents whom I met. I guess going back to Costa Rica, there was Jos# Figueres. I got to know Figueres a little bit. I met Otilio Ulate, and was on the delegation when he was finally inaugurated. I got to know Mario Echondi who followed Figueres as President in 1954. During the revolution I met Daniel Oduber, a young Captain in the Figueres' forces, and President in 1974-78. Then there was Luis Alberto Monje, who later became President. In Guayaquil I met Velasco Ibarra when he came to Guayaquil during his political campaign. The Consulate General reported they thought he would be elected. The embassy reported they didn't think he'd be elected. He was, again, for about the fourth or fifth time. But we were just lucky. We just guessed it right. Q: How were relations between the embassy and Guayaquil?

STEVENSON: They were good. Communication by road was very difficult. It was still not possible in the rainy season, and even in the dry season, it was a very rough road. George Vest drove a Model A Ford down and paid a visit one time, George and his wife.

The naval mission had a Beechcraft in Guayaquil, and I recall once in the two years I flew up to Quito on it. But some people flew up more often than that on this naval mission plane. I remember it was always kind of hairy because you had to fly in through these high mountain passes and you had to make sure a pass was open. It was quite a trip. By train,

I never made it. There was a train. There was one place called the Nariz del Diablo, where the train had to back to get around a corner, and a couple of times locomotives had fallen off at that point.

Q: In other words, you weren't—

STEVENSON: You weren't enthusiastic about going by train, no. I did fly up one time. I'd say we operated pretty independently, but with all due regard for the embassy. Paul Daniels was the ambassador when I was there, and I got to know him a bit. I met him when he came through Guayaquil en route to Quito. When he came through, his little girls stayed with us a couple of days. It was still an old-fashioned Consulate General.

Q: You had two posts in Latin America, more the tradition type posts that one thinks of when one does think of O. Henry stories. What was your impression of the Foreign Service and of the Latin American circuit at that point, by the time you left in 1952?

STEVENSON: I was very favorably impressed with the people I dealt with. Tap Bennett, incidentally, was the desk officer then for Costa Rica and, I think, for Ecuador too somewhat later. Bob Newbegin and Allan Stewart—those are some of the old names.

Anyway, as you asked me, I was very well impressed with the Latin American crowd and I enjoyed my tours in Latin America. I didn't particularly want to go to Germany, where I went next.

Q: Your next assignment was to Dusseldorf in 1952 to 1957.

STEVENSON: Yes. I will never forget that I hadn't been in Dusseldorf very long when Cecil Lyon came through there on a visit.

He was minister then in Bonn, and he came to Dusseldorf. I said, “Oh, yes, Mr. Lyon. You are a well known name to me and I know you have had a lot of experience in Latin America, and I've had two posts there.”

And I'll never forget, he said, “Oh, yes! And how does it feel to be out of the minor league?” (Laughter)

Q: I've had the feeling within the Foreign Service, from the time I was in there in the post-war years—I came in in '55—that Latin America was somewhat of a minor league. The real heart was Europe. But then for really exciting times, you had the Middle East or the Far East, and then when Africa opened, this was kind of exciting for a while. I'd like to get your impression of how you felt at the time about that.

STEVENSON: I wasn't really too aware of that. I was taken aback when Lyon made that crack. I hadn't felt that we were in a backwater or on the back burner. I found it very interesting. Of course, Spanish is my language, one that I had studied, so that made it interesting, too. I had read quite a lot about Latin America. But I think it's probably right that the big action was in other theaters at that time, and I don't think Latin America really got on the front burner until Kennedy and the Alliance for Progress. The Good Neighbor Policy was talked about.

Q: Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy.

STEVENSON: Yes. Sumner Welles was a well-known figure in the Latin American scene. But it had gone into a declining phase, I would say. In the 1930s, I think Latin America was much more important on the U.S. agenda, the trade agreements and so forth, and negotiations about Cuba in the '30s, with Sumner Welles taking the leading role.

Q: What were you doing in Dusseldorf?

STEVENSON: They sent me out there as Political Officer. I didn't know a word of German. Of course, I had to start learning German, and I had about a week or two here in Washington, and really learned it at Post. It was hard work, but by the end of three and a half years, (because they ran out of money and there wasn't any home leave, I stayed three and a half and took a transfer). I could speak pretty fluent German, and I had no trouble handling the debate in the Landtag. Again this was a Consulate General—in Dusseldorf—in Land North Rhine-Westphalia.

I was Political Officer. Parker Wyman was my deputy and a very good one. Parker spoke German very well. We covered the goings-on in North Rhine-Westphalia. We went to the first post war meeting of the Stahlhelm.

Q: A veterans' group?

STEVENSON: That was a German veterans' group, yes. It made the newspapers that Parker and I had gone to this thing. We were invited and we went and sat up in the balcony, just to see what was going on. We wrote a report on it, and which was very well received in the Department. But the Embassy got very nervous about our going to that thing and said not to go again to something like that without clearing with the Embassy. (Laughter) But on the whole, it worked out all right.

General Von Manteuffel came in for conversations at least twice and one or two other former German Generals as well.

Q: He was a well-known German general.

STEVENSON: Yes. We talked to Von Manteuffel a couple of times. I had a German assistant there who had been an officer in the German Army. He was the Foreign Service national assistant in the Political Section. He was very well connected. He knew Von Manteuffel and got him to step in. I don't remember much from that interview, but one thing I have always remembered. They got to talking about something they called “tapferkeit.”

“Herr General in den letzten krieg keine tapferkeit hat die soldaten, nicht war?” Or something like that. After it was over, I said, “Egenolf von Berckheim.” I said, “What in the devil is tapferkeit? You and the general were talking about tapferkeit, you didn't have it or you did have it.”

He said, “We had it in World War I but not in World War II. If the German troops were told to line up and march over a cliff in the time of World War I, they marched right over the cliff. But in World War II, they would not go that far.” (Laughter)

Q: As a political officer, what were you looking at? What were your marching orders from the embassy? You were there from '53 to '56.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: What were you looking at?

STEVENSON: We were interested in how democracy was settling in, so to speak, in West Germany. North Rhine-Westphalia was a very important state, Land, and we watched the politics there and reported on them, because a number of figures there became active and important on the national scene. [Konrad] Adenauer, of course, was Chancellor then.

One of our very good contacts was with Wolfgang Duering, who later was in the Bundestag and died of a heart attack while defending himself in the famous Spiegel scandal that came up some years after I was there. Also, Walter Scheel was a very good contact, who later became President of Germany. So in a sense, North Rhine-Westphalia was a political nurturing ground for German politicians who later went on to higher things. And actions taken in the state government were of interest. So we found ourselves pretty busy on the political front.

Of course, it was a big economic post. Jack Leary was there doing economic reporting, and Tom Kingsley. Later, my last year, I was in charge of the Consulate General's

reporting section, which included both political and economic, and I did some economic reporting on non-ferrous metals and iron and steel and coal.

Q: How did we view the SPD and the CDU? Those were the two major parties. How did we view the SPD at that time?

STEVENSON: We were perfectly open with the SPD and had contacts there, not as good as with the Christian Democrats, and also with the FDP, the Freie Demokratische Partei, (Walter Scheel and Duering and Willy Weir and several others). We had especially good contacts with the FDP, which more approached our secular party system, I'd say. But they were sort of a make-weight party. We knew that then. They could kind of go either way, and have gone either way. They've made coalitions with the SPD and with the Christian Democratic Party.

I would say we were very open in that respect. We were in no way hostile to the SPD, as later we certainly were in Chile. The Socialists in Chile, of course, were much more doctrinaire Marxists.

Q: SPD being the Socialist Party.

STEVENSON: Yes, of Willy Brandt in Germany and of Allende in Chile. We certainly were not friendly in Chile and made no bones about it. But in Germany at that time, we had very open contacts with the SPD. The Communist Party was declared illegal while I was in Dusseldorf. Well, not illegal, but they were non-registered because they didn't make five percent in one of the elections, as I remember, so they were then barred as a party.

Parker Wyman and I went to their last rally and reunion in Solingen. We got on a train from Dusseldorf one Saturday morning and went over to Solingen. We got right out in the crowd and listened to the communist leaders, Max Reiman and—I've forgotten; there was a younger one, Gup Angenfort, I believe. Everything was going along fine until finally we noticed that one of the speakers was talking about, “Watch out for agents provocateurs in

the crowd," and we noticed these women were looking at our shoes. You know, American shoes were a dead giveaway. (Laughter) I got nervous. I said, "Parker, let's get out of here. I'm getting awful nervous."

"Nah, that's all right," he said, "there's a lot of kids here." (There were a lot of children in the crowd). "They're not going to make any trouble." So we stayed until the end. But I was kind of relieved when the rally ended about noon and we went off to get some lunch. Just around the corner were about 500 heavily armed German riot police, just out of sight around the corner. So if anything had happened, I think they would have moved in on it.

Dusseldorf was an interesting experience, a completely different area, but I was glad to get back to Latin America.

Q: You were obviously due for a post in Washington after a good solid ten years out.

STEVENSON: Yes, and I did get one, of course.

Q: Your job was the Cuban desk?

STEVENSON: I went to Harvard for a year and got a Master's in Public Administration at the Littauer School, and then was assigned back to East-West Trade, which was the deadliest job I ever had in the Department. I didn't know whether I could stand it or not. It was such a dull job, where we were for example trying to find out who was shipping ten pounds of cobalt under the running board of their car, etc. I'm exaggerating, but there was a lot of petty stuff involved, and tedious, dull work.

So after about six months of that, which was in the Division of Economic Affairs. I can almost remember the fellow who headed it up for years and years and years, and I always felt he must have been uniquely qualified for it to stay there so long, Bob—what was it? A Scottish name.

Anyway, I heard there was an opening, (I was already looking around ARA), as the chief of the Middle America Branch in INR, (Bureau of Intelligence & Research), so I applied for that. Libby Heimann was the officer in charge then of the Latin American office in INR. At that time they had a rule that if you could get an offer of a job that was rated one grade higher than your Foreign Service or GS grade, they would let you go. So as it was one grade higher, I got out of E and for a year then I was in charge of the Middle America Branch, which was Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America.

In that job, I can say quite honestly we were the first ones, together with Terry Leonhardy on the Cuban desk, to really get worried about Castro. This was in December of 1957 that I went into that job, and by the middle of '58, Castro seemed very low; his star was waning and it looked as though he was never going to make it. But Terry Leonhardy on the Desk and myself and a couple of the others (Wayne Smith, who was working for me then in INR, and Ann O'Neill as well) were still pretty worried about Castro, and we said to ourselves, “We'd better find out all we can about this guy.” Because it was surprising how little we knew about him in the State Department at that time.

So being INR, we began to dig into it. We called on our friends across the river and were startled—

Q: That's a fancy way of saying the CIA. (Laughter)

STEVENSON: The CIA. Yes. Surprisingly, they had very little on Castro. We said, “We'd like to read his famous speech at his Moncada trial, called 'La Historia me Absolver#,'” “History Will Absolve Me.” They didn't have the text of it. It took them about six weeks and they finally ran down a Coronet magazine that had extracts from most of it, and that was the first time we'd been able to read this famous speech that Castro often referred to and was referred to by different people. But what did he say in the speech, you know? So we finally got something on that.

They turned up a list of the names that were on Castro when he was arrested in Mexico. I said, “Did you ever do a name check on the names?” There was great embarrassment and confusion; they hadn't. They hadn't run down the names.

Q: Did you get the feeling that Latin America and Cuba was a side show and wasn't of real interest within CIA?

STEVENSON: That's right.

Q: They concentrated on the Soviet Union or something.

STEVENSON: That's right. They really hadn't paid too much attention. I think they had a wire into him (Castro) because Park Wollam, who was our Consul in Santiago de Cuba, told me that when he got down there, there was a roomful of radio communications gear, and he asked his assistant down there, the vice consul, “What's that?” He said, “That belongs to . . .” I've forgotten his name, but it was the CIA man there in Santiago. “That's his.” Park, when he came back the next day or a day or two later, whenever it was, when he first got down there, the stuff was all gone and he never heard where it went. Well, there was only one place it could have gone. I figure they probably did have some sort of a line into the Castro camp, but it didn't pay off in terms of any useful intelligence.

On those names, for example, that were found on Castro, there was the name Yolanda Rodriguez. I had remembered that Alex Cohen told me that “the woman with the prettiest fanny in Costa Rica” was Yolanda Rodriguez. She'd gone to Mexico and had become the mistress of Umanski. He was the Soviet Ambassador in Mexico after World War II and was killed in a plane crash as he was taking off to fly back to Moscow. The plane crashed, and there was a great to-do over briefcases and whatnot in the wreckage. He was killed. I've always wondered whether this Yolanda Rodriguez could have been the same one who had been the mistress of Umanski. Just as an example there were interesting names, and they'd never been checked out.

I wrote to Alfonso Rodriguez, who was Deputy Station Chief in Mexico City, and had been Station Chief in San Jos#, a personal friend. I wrote him an official informal letter, which was unorthodox to say the least, and that caused a great furor. They began to get cranked up across the river and they gave me some stuff then. Maybe that was when I got the Coronet article. I rather think it was. They had to be stirred up.

Q: They were stirred up, but how about our desk? Thomas Mann was the Assistant Secretary for Latin America?

STEVENSON: No. Dick Rubottom. Ray Richard Rubottom. He began to get interested. I must say, for Terry Leonhardy on the desk, he was concerned, and I give him equal credit with us for really getting cracking on it. But at a more senior level, they hadn't worried too much. Even Bill Wieland, who was in charge of Mexico and Caribbean Affairs, wasn't all that concerned about Castro. He thought he was going to be knocked off eventually.

Q: Also, wasn't this the period where Earl Smith was the ambassador?

STEVENSON: That was a little later. Earl T. Smith did show.

Q: I have him from '57 to '59 in Cuba.

STEVENSON: You're right. Earl T. Smith was the ambassador, and he became in time an apologist and defender for Fulgencio Batista.

Q: Do you think this was sort of coloring it? He was a rather powerful man, wasn't he, as far as connections and all this? He was a political appointee.

STEVENSON: Yes, and a powerful character, a strong character.

Q: This helped tilt the apparatus in most of the State Department, didn't it? “Everything's all right. Batista's fine.”

STEVENSON: “Batista will weather it. Batista is our man.” I more than once heard the thing that they used to say about old Tacho Somoza, you know, FDR said, “Well, he may be an S.O.B., but he's ours.” I heard that quoted with regard to Batista, and there was some truth to it. But I also in later years talked with Willard Beaulac. He was the Ambassador to Cuba at the time Batista made his coup in 1952. He said, “Bob, I knew then that the people were never going to accept this.” They were ready for a democratic, reasonably honest election. When Batista saw that he wasn't going to win it, he took over. Really, it didn't go down with the majority of the Cubans. Beaulac was replaced, as you know, by Arthur Gardner, who was a businessman with no experience at all in the area. He came from the Bundy tubing family. He was just buddy-buddy with Batista, pictures of him with his arms around him, doing an abrazo and whatnot. Then came Earl T. Smith. So at high levels there was a lot of very pro-Batista sentiment. I would have to include Robert Murphy in this group.

Q: So, in a way, at a middle level within the State Department, in INR and at the desk, they said, “Wait a minute. This looks kind of . . .”

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: How did this whole thing play out as you were watching?

STEVENSON: After the summer of '58, Castro's fortunes turned up, because Batista launched his last big campaign against him in the Sierra Maestra and it failed. People began to see then that Batista had lost control. He had these corrupt Army officers. I've always said that if Batista himself had led his troops, because he, after all, had been a sergeant in the Army, if he'd ever taken the field himself, he might well have won it, because he had a lot of support among the little people, which people forget. Batista came from very humble mulatto stock, and he had a lot of support among the little people. It was the middle class and upper middle class who were really active in the anti-Batista proposition—the students and the doctors and lawyers and whatnot.

But it was pretty evident that Batista wasn't going to make it, so we kept digging hard. “Who is Castro? What makes him tick?” I can remember Assistant Secretary Rubottom asking me in early December of '58, before he went over to a big meeting at the Pentagon, where they were beginning to get pretty concerned, because you may recall that some of Castro's soldiers kidnaped some American sailors and took them into the mountains.

Q: Out of Guantanamo, wasn't it?

STEVENSON: Yes. They were going back to Guantanamo from leave or a night out on the town or something, and they were picked up by Raul Castro's soldiers and taken to his headquarters. Park Wollam did a yeoman job of getting them sprung. He really deserves a lot of credit for that. But he came back with some pretty disturbing information about the nature of the talk at Raul Castro's headquarters.

Before December of '58, we had pretty well concluded that Raul was a communist, but we still didn't think Fidel was. We couldn't prove it, and we didn't have solid evidence he was a communist. I can remember Rubottom asking me that very question before he went over to the above mentioned meeting. He sent for me from INR. By then it was known I was going to replace Terry Leonhardy on the desk, and I'd been going to ARA staff meetings. Rubottom ran very good staff meetings, I must say. He said, “What is it, Bob? Is he or isn't he a communist?”

I said, “Well, he's anti-U.S., that's for sure. He's got a very strong, bitter anti-U.S. feeling. But it seems to be more out of the nationalist cloth than the communist cloth. We really can't tie his position into being a communist.” I told him about Raul. I think that was the position of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, too, pretty much.

I still think probably it was the correct position, based on what we had. I still don't think, looking back on it now, that we could have won him over, and I think Ambassador Bonsal is now persuaded of that, too, although he really made a tremendous effort to see if he

couldn't keep Castro's revolution at least on the democratic track. I think Castro could have driven a very hard bargain with the U.S. if he had wanted to. But I have come to the conclusion that he really had decided he wasn't going to go our way; he was going to make his ties elsewhere.

One thing I want to get on the record here, because I don't think people are aware of it, but it was either January or February of '59, shortly after Castro came into power—he came into power on New Year's Eve, January 1, 1959—a delegation of Barbudos showed up in New Orleans with almost no advance notice.

Q: Barbudos?

STEVENSON: These were what they called the Castro soldiers, “the bearded ones.” There were about six or eight of them, and they showed up as an official delegation from the 26th of July forces. I remember that Camilo Cienfuegos was one of the members. If I remember correctly, Pedro Miret was another one, and Juan Almeida was in that group, who later was head of the Castro Army. They came up and said they wanted to lay a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. So I had to get in touch with the Pentagon, and they were pretty reluctant about it, but they agreed, okay, they would lay it on. These guys showed up in their clean fatigues, with their beards trimmed, neat, and they went though the ceremony very nicely, laid the wreath on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, then had wine or something afterwards, like a little cocktail or reception after the thing. It went very well.

The “why” of that always puzzled us. We never knew why we never got any word, what they wanted, really.

Q: Was there any feeling that maybe this was a peculiar way of trying to open up a dialogue?

STEVENSON: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you sort of stand around waiting for somebody to say something?

STEVENSON: Yes, we wondered what was behind it. I don't ever recall that we ever got very much on that at all. Of course, Camilo Cienfuegos later died mysteriously after he'd visited Huber Matos as an emissary from Castro. When Huber Matos was arrested, Castro sent Camilo Cienfuegos down to talk to him.

Q: This was where?

STEVENSON: This was in Cuba. There's the general feeling that Cienfuegos was kind of sympathetic with Matos, who was never disloyal to Castro, not at all. He was anti-communist, but he wasn't disloyal to the revolution. Cienfuegos may have intended to come back with that message, which wasn't the message Castro wanted. At any rate, his plane disappeared when he left Matos' place, and no one ever knew what happened to him. We suspected at the time that he might have been shot down.

But coming back to that delegation, we could never figure it out. Then it wasn't too long after that, in April, that the American Society of Newspaper Editors invited Castro to come up to the States and make a speech. He didn't clear that with anybody nor did the ASNE. He didn't go to the Embassy or anything. He just accepted. So there was debate. “Should we make it an official visit or not?” I don't think we ever, in looking back on it now and trying to remember, at desk level I don't think we ever felt that we should make it an official visit, considering the way it was done. He'd already spoken out pretty critically of the United States, and he didn't check with anybody before he accepted. I don't think there was any thought that it should be an official visit in which President Eisenhower would have received him.

But he was not badly treated. I would say he was very well received. I wrote an assessment of his visit, at the end of the visit, for the Secretary, and I felt he was much friendlier when he left here than when he arrived. There is one report that Raul got quite

worried that he might be changing his course and decide that he could work out a deal with the U.S., and got after him about it. They had a big fight in the hotel room down in Dallas as he was leaving here, and I think that was in an FBI report. I think it's probably true. He may have wavered a little bit, because he did get a good reception, no doubt about it. Even Vice President Nixon. I was over in the hallway (when Vice President Nixon talked to him) along with Wylie Buchanan, the Chief of Protocol, and Castro's Naval and Army Aides. We sat out in the hall there. Vernon Walters was there, the interpreter. Vernon Walters went in with Castro, but he hadn't been in there five minutes when he came out again and we said, “Que pasa?” And he said, “They've been talking in English and they feel they don't need an interpreter.” So he came and sat in the hall with us.

So they talked for about two hours. When it was over, they came out and met the press and stood together in kind of a friendly, chatty fashion. Then when it was over, the Vice President said, “Come on back into the office. I want to talk to you fellows.” So we came in and sat down with him. He looked very tired. He had obviously put a lot into that conversation. He turned to me, after he'd discussed a little bit of what he said, “I talked to him like a Dutch uncle,” I remember he said. He said, “What do you think? Do you think I did any good?”

I remember thinking, “What in the hell should I say?” (Laughter) But I said, “To be honest, I'd like to think that you did, Mr. Vice President, but my honest opinion is that you probably didn't.”

He kind of stood up and clapped his hands to his thighs and said, “That's what I think, too.” So I had gotten the right answer, as far as he was concerned.

Q: Just as an aside, the picture I get of Richard Nixon is that most Foreign Service people probably would have voted against him, but at the same time, on the professional side, the feeling was that here was somebody who had done his homework and works very

hard in foreign affairs, much better than many presidents or vice presidents. Was this your impression?

STEVENSON: Yes. That was exactly my impression. He went up in my estimation after that talk with Castro, because I thought he'd made a sensible and genuine effort to see if there was any wavelength that we could find, where we could come to a reasonable modus vivendi with Castro.

Q: Had you briefed him at all?

STEVENSON: No.

Q: Had papers been prepared for this?

STEVENSON: Probably that. I can't remember, but I wouldn't be surprised, because I do recall that I went to a big meeting on Cuba which the Vice President chaired, and I was the low man on the totem pole and had to do the memorandum. I do remember doing that. That might have been after this time. I don't recall doing something for him on this meeting, although we must have set it up.

Castro also went over on the Hill and talked to Senator Wayne Morris and Representative Charles Porter, who had been his supporters in Congress, although he never forgave Wayne Morris for speaking out vigorously against the executions that began to take place. You know, in January and February, they began shooting these fellows, these Batistianos, and killed some 500 and some. Morris was very critical of what he called “drumhead justice.” Castro never forgave him for that.

What I remember, what particularly sticks in my mind about the speech Castro made to the ASNE was his promise of free elections, but I noticed that he had extended it. He used to talk about free elections in 18 months, then free elections in two years, and then I think it was at the ASNE that he said free elections in four years. I certainly noted that

he was putting off free elections. Of course, he's since said that they mean nothing, even though in his speech “History Will Absolve Me,” he speaks very highly of democracy, the constitution of 1940, and the need for free and independent opinion. When he got into power, he didn't follow that at all.

But certainly when he left here, he was in a friendlier mood than when he arrived, so I don't think the visit went all that badly. Some people have said, you know, that on that visit he was looking for help, and if we had been more forthcoming, if Eisenhower had received him, things might have been different. I don't believe that for a minute.

Secretary Herter had a luncheon for him over at the Statler Hotel. I attended that. I was way down by the salt, you know, as far down as you can get, but I have always remembered it. Castro had an escort of about ten or twelve barbudos with Tommy guns, and they were sitting in a corner of the room. Finally, Herter's aide said, “We really don't need them sitting in here in the dining room. Would you have them move out?” So they did, they moved out. But this was right in the hotel, they had this armed guard sitting there when we first got there.

The luncheon went very well. There was a lot of kidding, a lot of jokes. Castro has a sense of humor and so did Herter and Rubottom, and they were making cracks back and forth. I thought it really went very well. Then the Cubans had a reception for him, for which he bought a new set of tailor-made fatigues and had his beard trimmed. He looked very sharp. I remember going to that and shaking his hand. I was introduced to him at the luncheon.

Earlier, before April, even, Assistant Secretary Rubottom had said, “We ought to try to help these people and ought to let them know we're willing to help if they're willing to work with us.” And we offered them a $25 million standby loan, I remember that. I've never forgotten Rubottom's surprise—I think it was when the finance minister, Regino Boti, was up here just before Castro's visit—when Boti turned him down and said, “Thank you very much, but

we don't want it, don't need it." Afterwards, Rubottom turned to me and said, "Bob, what do you think of that?" And I remember saying, "I don't know what to think." I was surprised, too, that they turned it down.

We all thought there might be a possibility of working with the Castro government, except for John Calvin Hill, God rest his soul. He was the only one. John Calvin Hill was the special assistant to Rubottom. John said, "I don't believe it. He's not going to do it." And John was the only one. The rest of us, with the first cabinet he appointed, which included a number of moderate, reasonable people, we thought there might be some possibility of doing business with him. I think Ambassador Bonsal still kept that hope for quite a lot longer than the rest of us did.

Q: In a way, this is what you are supposed to do.

STEVENSON: Sure. You can't function if you don't.

Q: You don't give up on something. If an ambassador gives up when there is the possibility, then in a way they're not performing their role.

STEVENSON: Right. I think the last gesture—and I give Ambassador Bonsal a lot of credit—was on January 21, 1960, when he replied to a Cuban note. I went in with him one Sunday when it was drafted. I may have gotten in one sentence, but it was largely his. It had to go over to President Eisenhower to be cleared, and it was a very reasonable note. It said something to the effect that, we've had problems, but we are old friends. We are countries that have had a long relationship. Let's see if we can't start over again and get on a better footing. It was a very reasonable, conciliatory message, and I've always given President Eisenhower a lot of credit for signing it at that stage, or okaying it.

But it was right after that, that an ammunition ship exploded in the harbor of Havana. La Coubre, the Belgian ship loaded with ammunition blew up at the dock, and Castro blamed us for it. From then on, there was really no talking. Ambassador Bonsal kept trying,

but they really weren't ready to talk seriously. They began nationalizing more and more American interests. You know the pattern of how it went from then on.

I am intrigued recently by glasnost and perestroika, and wondering if Castro couldn't be subjected to some pressure on his commitment to the democratic way of life.

Q: Glasnost and perestroika, in today's parlance, these are Russian terms of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, as beginning to open up and have more political freedom.

STEVENSON: Right.

Q: Which Castro has been resisting strongly.

STEVENSON: Oh, yes. I discussed it with my old friend Wayne Smith several times in the last three or four years, and I think where I differ with Wayne is not that we shouldn't try to come to a better modus vivendi with Cuba, that we'd both be better off, but that I don't think Castro really wants it. I think he's afraid of free movement of people and a free expression of opinion. I think it really scares him. I'm not at all sure that the majority of Cubans, if given a free choice, even today, would vote for the Castro policies and the Castro regime. They have much feeling and respect for the United States. Anti-U.S. feeling was never a powerful thing, even when Castro was in the Sierra Maestra. Anti- Batista feeling was very strong. “Get rid of Batista and let's have honest elections and honest politicians,” something that Cuba never had, except the one election that Batista permitted, one honest election in '44. Batista permitted it and let it happen, and could have gone down as a great man in Cuban history if he'd let it stand at that point.

But the Cuban people were never really all that hostile to the United States. When Ambassador Bonsal had been there about two weeks in early '59, maybe March of '59, he went to a baseball game in Havana at the stadium, one of the pro teams. And baseball was a big thing—and is still a big thing—in Cuba. When he entered the stadium, the announcer said, “The American ambassador has entered his box,” and the whole crowd

stood up and cheered and clapped. Castro was very discomfited. He was there. He was very discomfited. Ambassador Bonsal told me years later, he said that it was reported to him that what Castro said on that occasion was, “Excesivo.” (Laughter)

Q: You mentioned that Richard Rubottom held very good staff meetings. How were these done? STEVENSON: He had a staff meeting at a quarter to 8:00 every morning, and you'd better be there. In a sense, they were his daily alert briefing as to what was going on in his area, in his hemisphere. He went around the room and called on people. If you had anything to say about your area, or if any question had come up, he wanted some comments. He had the desk officers attending and the office directors, what we called them then, Mexican and Caribbean Affairs, Bill Wieland and Alan Stewart. Then there was the South American office, too, and the desk officers. The desk officers felt very much a part of the front office operation. He never let them run on; he kept them short and to the point, and they were for his benefit, to alert him, keep him posted.

This is many years later. There was a great rivalry, you know, between Rubottom and Thomas Mann. We sensed it at the desk level. Tom Mann was Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs at the time. I think he had been Ambassador in El Salvador. Yes, I know he had. He was then Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, and Rubottom had been Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs for three or four years.

I'll never forget that on January 1, 1959, we were all in the office early, and hung over, we'd all been out on New Year's parties the night before and hadn't expected Batista was going to leave right then. I was waked up by Ben Myers, one of the wire service reporters, about 5:00 in the morning, saying there was a report on the wire that Batista had fled. I got up and dressed and went at once to the office.

Tom Mann came down the corridor, and I'll never forget, he stuck his head in the door and said, “You fellows better batten down the hatches, because there's going to be some real

stormy weather." He walked on down the hall. Of course, he was right. Tom was shrewd. And then later he succeeded Rubottom in that job.

Q: Were you there at that time?

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Can you compare and contrast Rubottom and Mann, their outlook and how they operated?

STEVENSON: They're both very capable people. I think Rubottom was much more flexible. He was willing to work with a leftist government, i.e., a social democratic government or progressive government. He would have worked with them much more easily than Tom Mann. Tom Mann was much more right-wing conservative than Dick Rubottom, although Dick, I think, is probably conservative. But he was a liberal-conservative, if you will. Tom Mann was conservative-conservative. He was very much hard line, practical hard line. He'd say, "My father was an old Texas judge and he always used to say, 'Sometimes in error, but never in doubt.'" He said, "That's what I follow. That's the practice I follow."

Of course, Bill Wieland then went into an eclipse, as it became evident that relations had really gone sour with Cuba.

Q: Wieland had been saying that we might be able to do something?

STEVENSON: Well, no, Bill had pretty well given up on Castro, but I think where he was faulted is that he should have been aware earlier that Castro was so hostile to the U.S. I guess that's the way you'd find it. He was suspected. He was hauled up before the Subversive Committee of Congress. What's it called? Something like that. He was hauled up before them and given a real hard time. But he was anti-Castro. He was a liberal and he'd been brought in by Sumner Welles. That made them look a little bit askance at him,

because Welles' sexual deviation was known to them. He had been guilty of some wild statements that weren't very useful. I've forgotten. One of them made on a plane, to Bob Hill, or in the presence of Bob Hill, who was later Ambassador to Mexico. He was suspect by the right-wing crowd.

He wasn't a very good Office Director. He's dead now, God rest his soul, but he wasn't very good. He was a tough guy to work for, very difficult to work for, hard to know what he wanted and hard to know what he believed. He kept shifting his ground. But I never for a minute thought he was pro-Castro or certainly pro-left. He tried desperately to push through our influence on having Batista hold a really honest election earlier and for the U.S.A. to make contact with groups in the 26th of July who were clearly anti-communist. But that all came too late. It was much too late. The Castro thing had too much momentum and there was no change. Now, whether that was his fault, I don't know, I mean whether he should have tried sooner.

He'd been brought into the job by Dick Rubottom. They had worked together in Caracas when Wieland was with USIA in Caracas. Wieland had worked as a newspaper reporter in Havana. One of the little things that always hurt was that he'd used another name when he was in Havana. His mother had remarried a Cuban, and he used the name Guillermo Montenegro instead of William Wieland, for six or seven years. Then when he came with State, he forgot to tell them that he'd used another name. I think when Rubottom found that out, he felt betrayed, you know, really let down.

Q: It's misleading, rather badly misleading.

STEVENSON: Badly misleading. As I say, I remember when the FBI talked to me, and I told them, “Look. I never liked the guy. He was difficult to work for, but he was no more a communist than I am or you are.” He wasn't.

Q: We've gone through this time when the overtures were made to Castro, and it became apparent that this wasn't coming to anything. You were on the Cuban desk at this point. What were you doing?

STEVENSON: I was spending a lot of my time drafting notes to the Cubans on agrarian reform, on nationalization of properties. I was working very much with Marjorie Whiteman. She was in legal affairs for many, many years, working on Latin American legal matters. She was a very intelligent, able, knowledgeable, shrewd woman. She was the one that coined the term “prompt, adequate, and effective compensation.” That was her phraseology. I was busy drafting a lot of notes to the Cubans, saying, “We recognize your right to nationalize this stuff. All we're saying is you need to make prompt, adequate, and effective compensation.” I remember drafting three or four notes in that vein. I was spending quite a lot of time drafting memoranda.

Then the Bay of Pigs things got under way, and we weren't cut in on that.

Q: Were you aware?

STEVENSON: We knew something was going on from Cubans who came in and told us, but we honestly didn't know, really, any details at all. The weekend it happened, Tom Mann told us we should stay home and be contactable by telephone. But we didn't know any of the details. I'm not saying that if we had, we would have necessarily opposed it—although we never would have bought the idea of going in there unless we were going to succeed. You only do an operation like that if you've made the commitment to succeed. You can't say, “We're going to try. We may fail, but we're going to try.” Not a country like the United States. If we're going to attempt a thing like that, it's got to be with the commitment to make it work. Looking back, I'm not so sure.

But if we had made it work, it would all be forgotten now. Castro would be behind us and we would have a much better situation. I look at the Dominican Republic and I remember

all the yakking when the troops went in there. But the Dominican Republic has been so much better off politically ever since. People have just really forgotten about it. When some say that Latin America would have condemned us on the Cuban thing, I say, true, but they would have forgotten it by now, too.

Q: From a practical point of view, we are condemned again and again, but one can make the point that it's sort of expected. I mean, what would you do? The fact of not doing something is probably a much weaker message than doing something.

STEVENSON: Of course, what we did do was so flawed. Afterwards, I remember talking to Ed Vallon, and we were just astounded that we would have gone in with such an inadequately thought-through and worked-out proposition.

Q: How did you feel about the Kennedy Administration coming in and dealing with this whole thing? Obviously, the buck stops at the presidency, and the Bay of Pigs had been set up—

STEVENSON: Under Eisenhower.

Q: But still it was up to the Kennedy Administration to follow through. Did you get any feeling at your level about Kennedy involvement in this, and the fact that they were wishy-washy before or after the operation?

STEVENSON: I've always given him credit for saying, “I have to take the responsibility for it,” because I remember a cable from—who's that Harvard historian who was one of the Kennedy boys?

Q: Arthur Schlesinger.

STEVENSON: I remember a cable from Schlesinger saying in effect, you don't have to accept the blame for this. This thing was started under the Eisenhower Administration. It's something you inherited and you shouldn't take it. He didn't buy that. I give him credit for it.

What I do find hard to accept, even now, is that after the Bay of Pigs, under Ted Achilles, a task force was set up saying, “Okay, what do we do now? What's our next move? What are some policy options?” And Ted Achilles chaired this special task force.

Q: Ted Achilles at that time was that?

STEVENSON: What was he?

Q: Under Secretary for Political Affairs?

STEVENSON: He must have been a Deputy. He had a special position. Was he a deputy in ARA, or was he a special assistant on the Secretary's staff? He had been ambassador to Peru, I recall that.

Q: Maybe he was called in for that. He was counselor of the State Department.

STEVENSON: Yes. We met for about ten days and we really worked hard. I thought we came up with some pretty good suggestions as to what our policy should be. It went to Chester Bowles, and Bowles looked at it and then he got a two-page memo from his legal advisor, and I can't think for sure who the legal advisor was then. But he was a Kennedy appointee. He said in effect, we shouldn't regard this Cuban thing too seriously. It will pass, and we shouldn't let it become a number-one concern. Take an easy strain on it, and so forth. So when Bowles got over there, he completely discarded the memorandum from Achilles and used his legal advisor's pitch. Kennedy was disgusted, and reportedly said, “Is that the best the State Department can do? Is that all you can come up with?” That's always griped me that Kennedy was never made aware of the fact that some pretty able people under Achilles had given him some very thoughtful suggestions about policy. But

as far as I know, they were never brought to his attention. He chewed out Bowles, and I don't think Bowles lasted too long after that.

Q: Legal advisor was probably Eric Hager.

STEVENSON: No, Hager was good.

Q: Abram Chayes?

STEVENSON: That was Chayes. Yes. Hager I worked with earlier when he was legal advisor under the Eisenhower Administration. He was very good, very sound.

Q: Basically, Bowles and Chayes were both political appointees.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Bowles was renowned for taking a fairly soft—you might say liberal—line on this. But this might have been a way of backing away from the whole Cuban thing.

STEVENSON: Yes. “Let's put it off to one side.”

Q: Rather than trying to deal with it at the time.

STEVENSON: That's exactly right. Some of us felt we could have done some things.

Q: What were the main points that you were advocating?

STEVENSON: That's just too long ago. But we certainly were advocating a much more active policy, in that we shouldn't back away from the Cuban thing. I remember that we were impressed with the fact that when the Bay of Pigs happened, Castro arrested somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 people and put them into football stadiums and movie theaters and places like that. In other words, he was very nervous. He had a lot of opposition, still, in Cuba, and he knew it. When we backed away from doing anything after

the Bay of Pigs, then, of course, the Cuban refugee flow started. I got involved in that later when I came back, in my second incarnation as Cuban coordinator after Jack Crimmins. The refugee airlift and the flight of the middle class, somewhere between half a million and a million Cubans have fled Cuba since Castro came in, including many of the most educated, the technicians, and the more able people. He lost them.

The Kennedy Administration—the Alliance for Progress, certainly I liked that. I thought Kennedy learned from the Bay of Pigs experience. Remember Dick Goodwin, he was an interesting character.

Q: A speechwriter.

STEVENSON: He became his special Latin American hatchet man and leg man. I got along with Goodwin. He was difficult. I saw him a number of times.

I must say one thing that's always bothered me. By this time, Goodwin was very active. This was in the spring of 1961. I was Deputy Director for Mexico and the Caribbean, so Bob Hurwitch had replaced me on the Cuban desk. Cuba was still one of the countries I followed. I also had the Dominican Republic. We were troubled by the fact that Bob Murphy had been going down to the Dominican Republic. He was then out of the State Department. He'd been going down there with Cholly Knickerbocker, who was Oleg Cassini's brother. They were going down, apparently, as special emissaries from old Joe Kennedy, as best we could figure out.

I went over to the White House for a meeting with Goodwin, with my then chief, Ed Vallon. Ed Vallon and I went over to the White House and said, “What is Bob Murphy doing down in the D.R.?” This was after Trujillo had been assassinated. “What's Bob Murphy doing down there? We understand he's down there with Cholly Knickerbocker.”

Goodwin said, “You just call the things as you see them. Don't pay any attention to it. Do your reporting.”

We said, “We understand he's down there as a special White House emissary or something.”

He kind of smiled and said, “No, you just do your job and report it as you see it.”

I've never forgotten how Bob Murphy came back after his second trip down there. He came by Mexico and Caribbean Affairs, and Ed Vallon was up in New York. So he came to see me and said, “I don't like what you're doing in the Dominican Republic. You fellows better change your mind. You seem to be taking a line that's very hostile to Ramfis Trujillo,” (Trujillo's son who succeeded the old man). “You're pushing that line. I don't like it, and you'd better cut it out.” He got very threatening. I knew Bob Murphy as a very powerful guy, so I was pretty darn nervous. He said in effect, when I saw Ed Vallon in New York before I went down there the first time, he told me a story that Ramfis Trujillo, after a party, took some of his friends into a cold storage room and showed them the bodies of five of his enemies hanging on meat hooks. Such a preposterous story as that!”

I said, “Mr. Ambassador, I did see that story in an intelligence report, and it seemed to be very well documented. Would you mind telling me how you're so sure it isn't true?”

And he said, “Why, I asked Ramfis and he told me it was completely false.” But I must say, I've never forgiven Bob Murphy for that little business.

Q: Do you feel this is a case of Joseph Kennedy, the President's father, who had his own very conservative agenda? Because the Trujillos had very good ties with certain groups, particularly wealthy groups, within the United States.

STEVENSON: I think that must have been the case, and it didn't, of course, last very long, but it was a little sticky for two or three months.

Q: When you were dealing with Caribbean Affairs, you had all these islands getting together— the West Indies Federation—and you had the Dominican Republic, it looked like, was going to be another Cuba and all.

STEVENSON: Yes, we were worried about that.

Q: How did you feel about the Dominican Republic? What sort of reports were you getting out? STEVENSON: As long as old Trujillo was there, of course, we knew that the left wasn't going to get control. You may recall that Castro sponsored an invasion of the Dominican Republic, which was completely repulsed. In fact, I think almost everybody was killed, maybe one or two captured, but pretty much wiped out. We knew Castro had sponsored this thing. What I remember is that we were getting increasingly concerned about Trujillo and the lack of democracy there. We had the feeling that he might leave the scene and the leftists might take over, and that damn near did happen, of course.

Henry Dearborn was the deputy chief of mission down there, and Joe Farland was the ambassador. (I didn't know if I could bring that name back or not.) He was later ambassador to Bangladesh, of all places. But Joe Farland was an ex-FBI man and political appointee, but a pretty sound sort, conservative side.

I tend to get mixed up, because the assassination of Trujillo came later, and I think Henry Dearborn was charg# when that happened. Farland was there when Batista—you know Batista fled to the Dominican Republic when he first departed Cuba. I will say Batista wasn't mean like Trujillo. Trujillo was really mean and ruthless, but Batista wasn't, by nature, a mean person. He wanted to be liked. There was more than one occasion when he saved some little people who were working against him from being killed by his secret police. He was scared of Trujillo, and Trujillo shook him down for about a million-and-a-half dollars.

As a little aside there, I was the desk officer, still, then, and one of my jobs was to try to help him get out of the Dominican Republic, because we didn't want him down there. He was too close to Florida, and we wanted him the hell out of there. So his lawyer, Larry Berenson, who was a nephew of Bernard Berenson, the famous art historian and collector in Italy, his nephew was Batista's lawyer and had been his lawyer for a long, long time. He'd come and see me (and Robert Murphy) and we'd talk about where could Batista go. Berenson set off trying to find someplace that would take Batista. It was not easy. He went to Liechtenstein and Andorra and Holland and Ireland. We left it pretty much up to him, but we wanted Batista out of there, too.

I'll never forget that Bill Snow, who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of ARA at the time, he may have been Acting Assistant Secretary. It seems to me it was after Rubottom had left, but before Tom Mann came over. Anyway, Bill Snow was there, and he said, “Let's see if Ireland will take him.” So he called the Irish Ambassador, and the Irish desk officer and I were asked to sit in. We were sitting there, you know, in the back row. He was talking to the Irish Ambassador, who was a delightful little leprechaun type of a fellow, and Bill said, in his Maine accent, “We'd like to talk to you a little bit about Castro and Cuba and Batista.”

And he said, “Oh, Castro! He's a colorful fellow. I watch him on TV and my wife watches him on TV. Very interesting.”

Bill said, “Yes, he is. But we've got this problem with Batista. He's in the Dominican Republic.” And he went on and on about how it would be so good if we could get him out of the area.

Suddenly the little Irish Ambassador sat bolt upright and said, “You don't mean you want us to take him, do ye?” (Laughter) The Irish desk officer and I—I don't remember her name—we just doubled over. It was so funny. “You don't mean you want us to take him, do ye?”

And Bill said, “Well, you know, that is the idea, Mr. Ambassador.”

But he ended up not in mainland Portugal, but in Madeira. He spent his time writing books about Lincoln. He was quite a scholar about Lincoln. He knew a great deal about Abe Lincoln. He was very interested in him. He's a man that history—his own actions ruined his place in history. It's sad. He was a self-taught clerk in the Cuban Army, a stenographer, of mulatto background, smart.

But right after the revolution down there, a few weeks after the revolution, a little Irish-American lawyer named Larry Crosby came by my office. He'd been a sugar-company lawyer down there for many years. I was feeling pretty glum, and he said, “Don't be so dismayed, Bob. Have faith in the inherent corruptibility of the Cuban people.” (Laughter) I thought of that the other day when Castro caught a group of his top officials grafting and had them executed.

Q: One of the highest ranking officers in the Cuban Army was executed for dealing in drugs.

STEVENSON: Corruption and dealing in drugs, along with six or eight others, too.

Q: Despite the pressure from Murphy and Joseph Kennedy, how were you reporting and dealing? What sorts of things were you getting out of the Dominican Republic at this point?

STEVENSON: We were supporting democratic elements there. We wanted to see democratic elements take over the country, and they were there. They'd been involved in the assassination. Some of them were then killed afterwards very brutally, of course. So was Trujillo, for that matter. Donny Reed—I remember Reed, a Dominican of American extraction, and other liberal Dominicans came up to see us and talk to us a number of times. We certainly pushed the democratic parties. It's been so long, I can't remember to what extent, but we certainly did.

You remember that Adolf Berle was brought in by Kennedy as kind of a special advisor on Latin America, and we never quite knew what his position was. He had an office up in ARA, but he wasn't Assistant Secretary. He was very old by then. He followed the Dominican thing to some extent, but he followed the Haitian thing more. He kept bugging us on Haiti. “Why can't we help these democratic elements (mostly out of the old Haitian labor movement) replace 'Doc' Duvalier?” He was just out of touch with reality. There was no future for mulattos in Haiti. The blacks had taken over and they were going to stay in power. But he had this idea that somehow we could put these “democratic” mulattos that he'd known, who were decent fellows, labor union leaders for the most part, we could put them in power. I can remember that about Haiti.

On the Dominican Republic, I can remember the time of the assassination and our pushing the democratic side of it after that. I suppose not too long after that, I went to the National War College, so that's when I lost touch with it. Incidentally Berle's son is now the President of the American Audubon Society.

Q: Before we leave the Caribbean, how about with the newly emerging countries of the island nations? Were you there at the time that they were coming out? I'm thinking of Jamaica, Trinidad-Tobago.

STEVENSON: No, that came a little later.

Q: Was that a source of any concern to us, how they would come out? Or did we feel that this was not a locus of concern?

STEVENSON: Some years later, I remember, under Charlie Meyer, some concern being voiced that they would weaken the OAS. I said, yes, I thought they would, because they introduced an element of one vote, for each little two-bit country, so to speak, English-speaking, and I thought if taken into the OAS on this basis, it would tend to weaken the OAS. I think it has. I'm not sure what other course could have been followed although

maybe a separate organization might have been better. But they wanted the OAS, and we went along with that. I think I was the only voice at that particular meeting that voiced that feeling—that they would weaken the OAS. Of course, I could be mistaken.

Q: This period of late '61 or so, were there any problems in Mexico?

STEVENSON: No. We were annoyed with Mexico for not going along on a number of anti-Cuban actions that the rest of Latin America went along with, Mexico being the only exception. Somewhere near the end of that time, I can remember Secretary Rusk, either in a memo, or ascribed to him or something, that he had said that we had gone along with this, that we wanted Mexico to take that position. I was never aware of that. I always thought that we were really quite annoyed with the Mexicans and that our actions would have been much more effective, we felt, if the Mexicans had gone along with us, but they didn't. I thought maybe it was more hindsight, that we said, “Well, since they won't go along with us, let's see if we can't use the relationship and get something from them, somehow.”

Q: Were you concerned with trying to persuade the Mexicans to join us on the anti-Cuban stand?

STEVENSON: No. I think by then we realized that you couldn't press the Mexicans. You could try to persuade them, but the worst thing you could do was try to put any pressure on them.

Q: They had their own political agenda, too.

STEVENSON: Yes, and we were well aware of it by then. Q: After the Bay of Pigs, did you feel that within the State Department those of you who were dealing with Cuba, that people treated you sort of off to one side?

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Because when a policy fails, sometimes the people who dealt with it sometimes have a problem within any organization. I was wondering whether you felt that way.

STEVENSON: Yes. Yes, definitely so. I think it was in 1961 that I was given the Meritorious Honor Award, but I didn't get promoted that year. I was called in by the Assistant Secretary for ARA, who said he was very sorry that I wasn't on the promotion list, but that I could understand that it would have been very difficult to send my name up on a list to the Hill.

Q: The Hill being Congress.

STEVENSON: Yes, the way the thing had gone. I could understand that. I was disappointed, but I could understand it.

Q: Were you having congressmen breathing down your neck, "Why don't you do something?" and sort of derogatory terms of the Foreign Service having lost Cuba and all?

STEVENSON: There was a little of that. I don't remember who some of the names were, but there was a little. Charlie Porter, of course, and Wayne Morris were pretty much out of it. At least Charlie Porter was defeated. Wayne Morris hung on a little longer. Of course, he and Porter hated each other's guts.

Q: Morris was senator from where?

STEVENSON: Morris was a senator from Oregon; Porter was a congressman from Oregon. Very independent, both of them.

After the way things went in Cuba that first year, 1959, Castro pretty well lost any support on the Hill. He really didn't have any. Then, of course, came the Bay of Pigs. Yes, we did feel that even though we hadn't been involved in that, I was still astounded that we'd gone

into it with so little understanding of what we were getting into. In subsequent years, I met the Agency man who was running things, and he was not very impressive, I must say.

Q: This is part of the problem. If you want to do something and be active, it's just as well not to talk to people who deal with the political reality.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: I see you went to the National War College in 1961 to '62. Did you, in a way, feel that this was a good way to get out of the firing line?

STEVENSON: I sure did. I was glad to get away from it.

Q: Do you think this was given to you, in a way, to get you out of the firing line, or was this a standard assignment?

STEVENSON: I think it was considered a very good assignment, and I think the people in ARA, Tom Mann included, thought I had done a good job and wanted me to get something good. I thought it was a very good assignment, and I was ready to leave. I could see that nothing was going to change in Cuba for a long time, that it was a non-solvable problem at that stage. You couldn't do much with it. Yes, I was happy to get out.

Q: Then your next assignment, you were there from 1962 to '65 as Political Counselor in Santiago, Chile. What was the situation in Chile at that time when you went there in '62?

STEVENSON: I'll come back to that right away, but before we leave the Cuban situation, there's one thing I'd like to tell you about. In the summer of '62, after I had left the War College and before I went to Chile, I was asked to sit in on a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). I was assigned back to INR just temporarily, to fill in until time to leave for Chile. In INR they said I would sit in on an NIE on whether or not missiles were going into Cuba. I always enjoyed working on National Intelligence Estimates, and I said, “Sure.”

So we worked on that, and I think it was in early August of 1962, we had our final session. It was chaired by an Agency (CIA)fellow. I think it was someone named Montgomery, a very impressive guy. Anyway, we all concluded, except one—the Air Force member took a footnote on it—we all concluded that the Soviets would not put missiles into Cuba. (Laughter) We just couldn't believe that they would be that stupid, is what it amounted to, and that the evidence was not conclusive. We concluded that they would not do it, except for that one member's footnote, which I still think was emotional rather than reasoned or based on fact. I just wanted to get that in here, to show how wrong we were.

Q: Again, this is the hard thing. When you are sitting down with a group of experts on a place, you look at the political reality and what you should do. But then in a way, if somebody such as Khrushchev decides, "By God, I'm going to do this," going against his experts, perhaps, you're always going to be wrong if you try to figure out how essentially an eccentric leader will see things.

STEVENSON: Yes. That was just before I went to Chile that I did that. Then when I got to Chile, Jorge Alessandri was the president. He was a middle-of-the-road radical. Radicales weren't at all radical; they were very much a middle-class party, not even social democrats, although sometimes they pretended to that coloration. The Christian Democrats were coming along strong. I got to meet Eduardo Frei, as a Senator, and got to know him and had him out to the house one time for lunch with Ambassador Bonsal. He was a very nice fellow. I have a lot of respect for him. Frei, who is now dead, was a very decent man. Radomiro Tomic I got to know, too, but I never trusted Tomic, and I still wouldn't. He does, however, have a most charming wife.

It was a very active country politically, because democracy had flourished pretty much in Chile, and Congress was very much a going concern. To be invited to high tea with a senator at the Congress was really something. I was impressed—this happened to me a couple of times—and you'd see a Conservative senator say "Hi" to a Communist senator, and he'd say, "Como est#, Pedro?" or something. So there was some nice contact there

in the democratic sense, even with those to whom you were strongly opposed politically. I was really impressed with Chilean democracy, and I followed that (1964)campaign very closely.

Q: This is when Frei—

STEVENSON: When Frei defeated Allende and Duran—Duran ran under a coalition called Frente Democratico, I think it was, which was Radicales and Conservadores and Liberales banded together; and then the Christian Democrats ran Frei, and the Socialists and Communists ran Allende under FRAP (Frente Democratico Popular).

Allende made approaches to the Embassy. I still think we were right not to respond, because he was only trying to use us, in my opinion. He wanted to use contacts with the Embassy to show that he was just another ordinary politician, no foe of the United States and so forth. At any rate, in that election, in 1964, Frei won an absolute majority. I was lucky; I predicted the exact vote for each candidate and won the embassy pool, and I had the satisfaction of my Ambassador saying he was very proud of his Political Counselor because he'd won the pool. (Laughter) I was lucky.

Q: The Ambassador was Phillip Bonsal at that time?

STEVENSON: No, this was Charles Cole.

Q: Yes. Charles W. Cole, a non-career.

STEVENSON: Ex-president of Amherst, member of the Fly Fishermen's Club of NYC and ardent fly fisherman. John J. Jova was the DCM, an extremely able DCM. You haven't interviewed John Jova, have you?

Q: No, we're planning to.

STEVENSON: I learned much from John. He was a very able guy, a skillful negotiator. He used to take me with him on some of the high-level stuff. I remember when Duran talked about pulling out of the election, and this concerned us because we thought many of Duran's votes then might go to Allende. So I went with John when he di# la cuerd# Don Julio, he wound Duran's clock. (Laughter) And he did it very well, and Duran stayed in the race and drew his five or six percent of the vote.

Q: What were American interests in Chile when you were there?

STEVENSON: Politically, we wanted democracy to stay in power. We were skeptical of Allende and his crowd, and I think rightly so. It's not accurate to say we didn't take sides, because just as they're talking about Nicaragua, whether we should try to help the democratic crowd down there, when the '64 election loomed on the horizon and the FRAP socialist candidate won a congressional by-election in Curico Province, a very close one, and we didn't call it right—I didn't call it right. The FRAP did win it by a few hundred votes over a Christian Democrat, and the Frente Democratico candidate was third. Tom Mann was Assistant Secretary, and he got very concerned. He sent down—what was his name from the Agency? He's dead now. A very sharp guy, brilliant, really, to talk about the situation with us. Marietta Tree's first husband, the father of the girl who wrote Fire in the Ashes. What was her name?

Q: Fitzgerald.

STEVENSON: Yes. Des Fitzgerald came down. So everybody was very concerned. We discussed whether we would help Frei and the Christian Democrat crowd. He was getting some help, but the Communists (FRAP) were obviously getting much more help. They really were financing a very strong campaign for Allende. The decision was that we would not help unless Frei wanted us to help. If Frei indicated he wanted our help, we would. I happened to be the one that they came to when they decided they did want help. They came to me, these two fellows, and asked to meet me at my house, a couple of politicos

that I knew. Rudy Fimbres was with me. They said, “We come from the Senator, and he really would like your help.” So then we did help in that campaign.

Q: By “help,” what do you mean?

STEVENSON: We supplied money. We helped him.

Q: Were we having reports that the Soviets were giving money to Allende?

STEVENSON: We felt that they were. We had plenty of reports that they were. There was no other source. There was no other way they could have run the expensive campaign they were running without outside resources. There was just no way they could have done it. It included radio time. Chile was a democratic country, and Allende was allowed to campaign freely.

I still think—of course, I guess I was in Colombia when Allende came to power—but I still think that if he had run a social democratic government and had not tampered with the Congress and pressed for revision of the Constitution he could have done his seven years. But he just went too far for the Chileans.

Q: In Chile, what did you do as a political counselor?

STEVENSON: Since it was a very active country politically, maybe too much so, a president gets elected and the political shenanigans begin the next month.

Q: It's a seven-year term, but one term.

STEVENSON: Right. Well, I was very busy there getting to know the different politicians, getting to know how they thought, how they felt. As I say, I met many, many of them, and my job was to cover the campaign. I went out to campaign rallies, and Rudy would cover some. Then we had a third officer. We covered the rallies. We covered the campaign very well and reported how we saw the thing developing.

Again, the whole thrust was we hoped that the democratic forces would win.

Q: How much was the American business interest in Chile wagging your tail?

STEVENSON: They were there, but I would say not at all, not that we really felt that factor. The copper companies were there. Kennecott copper and Anaconda were real big. There were two or three other big American outfits down there. They were progressive, in that their wages were higher than anybody else's. I went up to the dedication of a big housing project up in the north one time, sponsored by Bethlehem Steel. They had done a real good job of housing for their workers. Nothing we had to be ashamed of in the way the American business was operating in Chile, nothing at all.

I suppose later there was the thought that even the Christian Democrats were not uncritical of American interests. They had their left fringe, too, pretty strong, Padre Vekemans and others. And it was Frei who nationalized the copper. But they had this thing that we, I guess, had imposed. They sold their copper at a fixed price to the U.S. and the world price might be quite different, but all the big copper from Anaconda and Kennecott had to be sold in the U.S. at, say, 30 cents, whereas the world price might be 50 or 60. If you were in the peque#a mineria, the small producers, you could sell at the world price. There weren't more than three or four big ones that had to sell at this fixed lower price. This used to annoy the Chileans, though they had gone along with it because it was a good deal when they first got it. Then the world price went up and, of course, they would have liked to have been out of that arrangement. Of course, this was the big source of their foreign exchange.

I liked Chile and the Chileans. An interesting place to be. I found it hard to believe, after the overthrow of Allende, some of the atrocities that took place. It was very hard for me to believe. It just didn't seem to fit the Chilean mold as I had known it. But Rudy Fimbres went back down there, and I trust Rudy, and Rudy told me, “I'm sorry to say it's all too true, that some of this horrible stuff did go on.”

Q: How about the Chilean military at that time? How did you view it?

STEVENSON: Very impressive. Very impressive. Very professional. I met a number of them. I negotiated the new Naval Agreement for a Naval Mission with the chief of staff, General Otto. I found him an extremely able guy, very balanced and level headed. I didn't know Pinochet. I never met him that I recall.

Q: But you didn't feel that here was a group of military people, hard right-wingers, sitting there glowering, waiting for their chance?

STEVENSON: No, I didn't get that feeling at all. And I still think—and I've read Pinochet's book— and I still think that if Allende hadn't pressed it so hard—he was pressed by his left wing—I would have to say, but if he hadn't gone so hard with the thing, I still think they would have let him do his seven-year term. Of course, as you know, he was a minority president. He had 36 or 37% of the vote, and the other vote was anti-Marxist. But Frei went along in the Congress with voting for Allende. That had been the tradition.

Q: You were there when Frei was elected, is that right?

STEVENSON: Yes, in 1964, and I was there for the Frei inauguration.

Q: Then you left.

STEVENSON: Ralph Dungan came down from the Kennedy crowd, one of the ex-Irish mafia from the White House, a very able, very smart—but I guess I'd qualify that—not so able as an ambassador, although I'm sure he learned and got better in the process, but when he first came, he was pretty hard to take and not all that sharp on how to run a good Embassy. But he learned. I always got along with him. He asked me to stay on there as his DCM, but Tom Mann wanted me to come back to replace Jack Crimmins as Cuban Coordinator.

Q: You went back to Cuban affairs.

STEVENSON: Kicking and screaming, yes.

Q: In 1965. I would imagine that you could have seen your heel marks all the way from Santiago up to Foggy Bottom.

STEVENSON: Dungan asked me, before he went up to Washington on a consultation, if I would be willing to be his DCM, and I said, “Yes.” He went up and made the pitch and was turned down by Tom Mann, who said they needed me up here.

Q: Mann, at that point, was Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs.

STEVENSON: Yes. Jack Crimmins went to the Dominican Republic, as Ambassador, to the Dominican Republic. Bill Bowdler was in the office as deputy, and he went over to the White House as Latin American man on the NSC. So the years in Chile were very interesting years. I thoroughly enjoyed them.

Q: You were from '65 to '67, back in Washington, dealing with Cuban affairs. Things were at their rock bottom, weren't they, at that time?

STEVENSON: Yes, they sure were. Again, there was no sign that we were going to be able to make any progress in either bringing enough pressure to get him out or enough pressure to bring him around or persuade him to come around to an acceptable modus vivendi. There didn't seem to be any hope.

Q: The Missile Crisis had gone.

STEVENSON: Long gone.

Q: So what did you do?

STEVENSON: We still had the policy, you know, of trying to keep the economic pressure on Castro, and there was a very good man over at Treasury. He used to annoy the hell out of you, but I have to give him credit. He was awfully good. What the heck was his name? He would always ride herd on the economic thing. He'd never let a screw go down there if it wasn't supposed to go down.

One thing, early on after I got back, the refugee thing came up. There were a lot of Cubans that wanted to leave Cuba, and the Swiss ambassador down there named Emil Stadelhoffer, got interested in this. He thought he was a big buddy of Fidel's, and I guess he was. So he apparently persuaded Fidel to say that he'd let these people go. In a speech (on July 26, 1965 I think it was) Castro said, “Anybody who wants to leave Cuba can leave Cuba. I don't care if they leave or not.” Or words to that effect.

So then the thing came to us, the cables and reports and so on. Jack Crimmins and I talked about it. So I drafted a memorandum for him to the White House from the Secretary of State, but it didn't go to Rusk. It went to the number-two man in State, George Ball. In the memorandum we said in effect, “Let's offer to take 25,000 refugees. That would be a forthcoming response, and we're quite prepared to take 25,000 and help them get out.”

Jack Crimmins went up to see George Ball, and George Ball said, “Twenty-five thousand? We'll take any who want to come! There should not be any ceiling on this at all. Any Cubans that want to come to the U.S. can come and we'll help them.”

So that started the refugee airlift. George Ball was really the one who made that decision although Jack Crimmins had to sell it to McGeorge Bundy at the White House.

Q: How many came out?

STEVENSON: About 270,000. About 500,000 all told were in the U.S. by early 1967. Great lists came up to us, and we were very busy then. The Czechs were representing the Cuban interests, and they'd send up these lists of names. The Swiss were representing us,

and we had a list of over a million names of Cubans whose relatives in the U.S. said they wanted to leave Cuba. Then we chartered these aircraft and had two flights a week that came up to Miami, just like clockwork. They came out of there by the thousands.

After it had been going on—it started in December of 1965, I think—along about March (Crimmins had left and I was the Cuban Coordinator). Stadelhoffer sent word he wanted to meet me in Miami to discuss whether or not the refugee airlift should be stopped temporarily so more order could be brought into the system and procedures and so on. But I was skeptical of Stadelhoffer's position under Castro and had reports of his chagrin that he had lost his entr#e to Castro. Castro, from reports we had, was pretty discomfited that so many were leaving. He was committed to let them go. He had lost the world opinion propaganda battle. The Castro government gave them a hard time when they signed up to leave, but still, hundreds of thousands of them signed up.

So I met Stadelhoffer in Miami, and he tried to persuade me to call a temporary halt to it, but I said, “Nothing doing. It's working all right as far as we're concerned. We wouldn't dream of stopping it. If Castro wants to stop it, he'll have to stop it. We would not.” So it went on until 1973, I believe.

Q: We are talking now in 1989, and there is concern because of the Soviet Union saying that it will let go a very large number of Soviet Jews, most of whom are expected to come to the United States instead of to Israel. There is concern about numbers. How about back in the '60s? Wasn't there concern? This cost money to help resettle and all this. Were people saying, “For God's sake, stop it.”

STEVENSON: No, there did not seem to be. It's interesting. It may be that one result of this is the current caution that we've both seen expressed, that we'd better be a little careful so we don't go overboard. Maybe we went overboard back in the '60s.

Q: Of course, we did have, frankly, a lot more money in those days to play around with.

STEVENSON: And we had a lot of Cubans up here. These Cubans that were coming had to have relatives. There was some little thing in there, you had to have a relative or something, but they all did. They didn't seem to have any trouble finding them. I think we felt a certain guilty conscience about Cuba, you know, because of the Bay of Pigs and the way things had gone.

HEW had the man down there in Miami who actually supervised their arrival and distribution and it was handled very well. I went down a couple of times just to greet the planes and see how it was working out. Jack Crimmins had established a branch office in Miami for the Cuban Coordinator of which FSO Henry Taylor was in charge. That was very useful. We had that office just to deal with the Cuban thing, and it proved very useful in those years—1965, 66, 67.

That kept me very busy. By accident, my name and file were sent to Rey Carlson in Bogota, who needed a DCM.

Q: He was our ambassador in Bogota.

STEVENSON: Yes. Because Henry Dearborn was leaving. He read over the files and sent up a cable that he would like to have Stevenson. I saw the cable. I wasn't supposed to see it. When I saw that cable, I made a beeline in to Assistant Secretary Bob Sayer, and said, “Bob! Let me go! Let me go! I've had Cuba up to here.” And he was nice about it and said, “Okay,” and let me go.

Q: You must have been deluged with a surplus of information about what was happening inside Cuba, weren't you, just because of all these people coming back—CIA? You must have known what was happening in every little hamlet if you wanted to know.

STEVENSON: That's right. You're absolutely right. The CIA interviewed these people and they sent us interesting reports, so we really had good intelligence on Cuba.

Q: What was the feeling at that time? Castro was there to stay? There might have been some unrest? People were obviously opting to get out, but the government was—

STEVENSON: The impression I had is that the Cuban security apparatus was very, very good, and as long as that security apparatus remained so powerful, there wasn't a chance of anything happening, any sort of resistance being mounted internally against Castro. The Agency had no success whatsoever with its feeler expeditions and whatnot. No success whatsoever, confirming what I just said, that Castro's security was very strong.

Q: An issue that came up ten years later was the fact that there was discovered a whole brigade of Soviet troops. Were you aware that if you put all the Soviet advisors and all together, that you had the equivalent to a brigade of troops?

STEVENSON: I don't ever remember focusing on that. We knew there were a lot there. Apropos of your comment about intelligence, I have to tell you that after I got to Bogota, I became on quite friendly terms with the Soviet ambassador, Nicolas Belous, as friendly as you are with these people. The DCM, also, Guennady Sackenov who was my opposite number, but I was Charg# down there for long periods of time, so I dealt also with Ambassador Belous. I used to delight in running into him at parties, when he would frequently ask, “What's going on in Cuba?” And I'd tell him what was going on in Cuba. I said, “You know, we have all these refugees coming out and they are interviewed by our intelligence people, and we have very good reports on the Cuban situation.” I'd tell him of all the latest problems Castro was having. He'd kind of laugh and nod his head. He didn't like Cubans. He didn't like Cuba. He had served there. It was curious.

Q: The Soviets and the Cubans are not a good mix.

STEVENSON: They're not a good mix, no.

Q: Probably the Americans and the Cubans are much better.

STEVENSON: A much better mix.

Q: There are these things that just don't work. I assume that probably hasn't changed much over the years.

STEVENSON: No. I must say that I think right now would be a good time really to look into the possibility of putting pressure on the Castro regime. I don't mean military pressure; I mean pressure of world opinion and what's going on in the Eastern Bloc and so forth, to the extent of the President saying, “Look. If you want to show that you're the freely chosen president of Cuba, go ahead and show it and we'll respect it if you show it properly. And in which case, if you, Castro, are elected by your people and by free choice, we'll end the embargo and resume normal relations.” I don't think Castro will buy it, but I think it's something we could try. I think it would put a lot of pressure on Castro.

I think one obstacle to this kind of line would be the Cubans living in Florida, many of whom are closed-minded about the thing.

Q: This is a factor that has become very important in American politics, as has the Jewish lobby in the United States, which has had a major effect on our relations with the Middle East. We now have nearly a million from Cuba in the United States, who have turned into a largely conservative and very important political group.

STEVENSON: Yes, which has some clout.

Q: Which has limited our flexibility in dealing with the Castro situation.

STEVENSON: I think it has. My whole point is not to help Castro, because I agree with Ambassador Bonsal that he is a very negative factor. Bonsal is so discouraged, he thinks unless Castro leaves the scene, there's absolutely no hope of changing the thing. I don't quite agree with that. I think Castro could be vulnerable to pressure now, and even staying on the scene, his role might change a lot.

Q: He is becoming the odd man out.

STEVENSON: He sure is.

Q: As things are changing, instead of the bright young flame of idealism, he represents the crusted old guard.

STEVENSON: Or Honecker in East Germany.

Q: We're talking about right now in September 1989. East Germany seems to be falling apart because of this.

STEVENSON: I think this idea scares Castro to death, you know. At one time he allowed relatives to come back, and about 100,000 Cubans poured down there, bringing gifts and whatnot from the bountiful land. It just caused an awful uproar there in Cuba, and then he clamped down on it. I think he's afraid of that, because he hasn't done well at all. I mean, the per capita GNP is about the same as it was when he came to power. He's distributed the pie differently, but the size of the pie hasn't changed.

Of course, one of the big problems is what would we do with Cuban sugar if we normalized relations. Because, meantime, we've divvied up the quota and got a lot of poor countries that depend on this sugar, and the whole system has changed. I still think it's a strange thing that the U.S. consumer still pays nearly $2 billion extra to its beet and cane sugar producers—nearly $2 billion a year, when we could be buying the sugar on the world market for a fourth of what we're paying for it—or a third, anyway. It's crazy. Whether there would be any room on imported Cuban sugar to, say, tack on a tariff that would raise a fund to compensate American cane growers, I don't know, but I'd like to see them work on something. I really think right now, for the first time (I haven't agreed with Wayne Smith that there was much hope before) I think now we could maybe put some real pressure on.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, you had been in charge of Cuban Affairs from 1965 to 1967. Then you were appointed as deputy chief of mission to Bogota, Colombia. How did this assignment come about?

STEVENSON: I hadn't really served my full tour again in Washington as Cuban Coordinator replacing Jack Crimmins, but somehow my folder was included among some folders, probably by personnel, that were sent to Ambassador Reynold Carlson in Bogota, at his request, to look over a possible DCM candidate to succeed Henry Dearborn. Apparently, Carlson liked my file, so he sent a cable in saying that he would like to have Stevenson if he was available.

I wasn't supposed to see the cable, but by chance, I did and I immediately went in to see Bob Sayer, who was Assistant Secretary for ARA at the time, and said, “Bob, I've had Cuba right up to my neck. Nothing's going to change in the Cuban equation for a long, long time. Here's a chance for me to have a shot at a DCM slot. How about letting me go?” Bob was very good about it and let me go to Bogota.

Rey Carlson was a former economics professor of developmental economics at Vanderbilt, and was a heck of a nice guy. I enjoyed working with him. He didn't know the first thing about running an embassy. Q: Why was he sent there?

STEVENSON: Well, there is a story that his name was on a list sent to President Lyndon Johnson, and Lyndon Johnson thought that he had met Carlson in Brazil, but it turned out he hadn't. Anyway, kind of by chance, he got it. He was working for the Ford Foundation in Brazil at that time.

So he was content to let me run the Embassy. He let me run the Embassy, and he did the front stuff and the contacts, and it worked out just fine. We had about two years together. He would take off for a month or six weeks, go back to the States up to Maine, where he had a place, and I'd be charg# d'affaires. He was succeeded by Jack Vaughn, who I

also knew and liked very much, but he was quite a different type of ambassador, used to running things himself, where Rey Carlson would have me run the weekly staff meetings. I'd actually chair them and he'd sit to one side. I'd call on people for their reports and comments, etc. Jack very much had run his own meetings. He'd been Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs when I was Cuban Coordinator the last few months. So the modus operandi changed some then, but it worked out fine.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived in Colombia in 1967?

STEVENSON: They were still operating under the agreement that the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party had arrived at, whereby they would alternate presidencies. When I got down there in the fall of '67, Carlos Lleras was the president, and before him had been a conservative. Now this was Carlos Lleras Restrepo, a Liberal. Actually, I got down there, I guess, in August of '67. While I was there, a Conservative came in, Misael Pastrana, and he was the last of the alternating Presidencies. Then they threw it open to the full democratic process, and I think that Julio C#sar Turbay was elected, and then, I know Lopez Michelson was elected. They were both Liberals I believe.

Q: Had this arrangement been brought about because of—

STEVENSON: Because of the violencia, the period of years of violence, when 100,000 to 300,000 people were killed.

Q: The violencia was in what period?

STEVENSON: Not too long after the Bogotazo, from 1948 to 1958, in that time frame, and it was a very miserable business. It was so bad that finally the Liberals and Conservatives got together and said, “This must stop.” I mean, whole villages—one village would set out and murder the people in another village.

Q: The situation when you were there was then stable.

STEVENSON: Quite stable, and there was no drug thing, I hasten to add. Probably drug traffic had begun then, but we were innocent. We were babes in the woods. We certainly weren't aware of it, nor was the Colombian Government. Looking back on it, we had a consular agent in Leticia, Mike Tsalikis, and the U.S. Customs had accused him of putting packets of cocaine in pythons that he'd shipped to the United States, or boa constrictors, I guess they were, because he was in the wild animal exporting business down on the Amazon in a place called Leticia. Mike, of course, had denied it. Mike was a former sergeant in the American Army, a very personable guy, and he denied it roundly. We kind of accepted that. We did end the Consular Agency in Leticia because we really felt we didn't need it. There was a restriction on funds and whatnot. But we didn't think Mike was guilty of drug trafficking. Looking back on it, I think probably he was guilty as sin, because he lived too well down in Leticia to be operating strictly on the wild animal export business. He'd built a hotel down there. He was always good to the Peace Corps volunteers whenever they got down to Leticia, which is, as you probably know, way the hell and gone down in a little corner of Colombia that borders on the Amazon, not too far from Iquitos, way up on the upper Amazon there. He built this little hotel, a nice little hotel, and he'd always put up the Peace Corps volunteers, a very good guy. But I suspect that he was very much into the drug business then.

I recall a German with an American wife who lived very well and supposedly got his money from a finca down on the Rio Magdalena.

Q: Finca being a ranch.

STEVENSON: Yes. What's the river called there, the big river? Magdalena, I guess. We assumed his money came from that, but looking back on it, no way could he have made that kind of money, his kids all in private schools, etc.

Q: There just wasn't an awareness, because it was not a major problem. We're speaking now of 1967-71. This interview is in 1989, in which Colombia is top priority as far as being

a source of drugs, and there's violence there within the country and all that. So in that perspective, we see quite differently.

STEVENSON: The system was really functioning quite well. The elections were reasonably honest. The court system, as in all of Latin America, is very defective. The legal system is very defective. I can remember a good Colombian friend, a lawyer, who was a very sharp lawyer, saying, “Every judge in Colombia has his price. Prices differ, but every judge has his price.” This is the sort of thing you had to contend with down there. So it was hard for the little man, as Graham Greene points out, to get justice. It's hard, really.

Q: How about the Alliance for Progress? How did that stand at that point?

STEVENSON: It was going strong. We had a big AID mission in Bogota. In many ways, Bogota was the most interesting job I ever had, because it was a big operation. We had a big AID mission. Marv Weissman was the head of the AID mission. We worked in the rural area with rural credit in a big way, setting up rural cooperatives, a land reform scheme that we helped to finance. We had a big operation going there. I would say not only was it going full scale, but it had some very positive effects.

Q: We talk about big AID missions, and there's sometimes the feeling that just the number of Americans, when AID comes into a country, the AID bureaucracy seems to proliferate, and all that money that's paid to them comes out of the AID allocation for the country. Did you feel that maybe the administrative tail was not worth the dog?

STEVENSON: No, I really didn't feel that about it. I know what you mean, and I think there is a tendency for the AID bureaucracy to get pretty inflated. But Marv Weissman was a very able Mission Director and he kept it pretty functional and operating pretty efficiently.

Mind you, I think it's good that this Mission has ended. I think the Mission did its job and the Colombians have gotten to the point where they should be able to do their own

developmental work. I was impressed, before I left Bogota, by the fact, for example, that they had 130 members in the M.I.T Club in Bogota—130 members!

Q: Graduates of Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

STEVENSON: And others of them went to Rensselaer. They had the technicians, in other words, the economists, and the experts, with the big help that we gave them in that period, to run it themselves. I think it's wise that we faded out.

Q: What were we trying to do with the Alliance for Progress there?

STEVENSON: We were trying to raise living standards, primarily.

Q: What type of programs were they, mainly?

STEVENSON: I've mentioned them. The rural credit program was a very big one, to try to help the campesinos. Let me see if I can recall some of the others. Of course, the rural credit had a big fertilizer component. Let's see if I can think what other things we did. There was a large technical component known as the Nebraska Mission which was headed by the present U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Clayton Yeutter. It was primarily in the rural area, the program was—crop diversification, land reform. There was a land reform law, and we were trying to help the Colombians to implement it. There were some big estates, big fincas, that were not productive, and it was felt that they would be more productive if the campesinos working them had an interest in their output.

Q: What about the Peace Corps?

STEVENSON: Peace Corps operated primarily in the rural areas, but also in some small industry, cottage industry, crafts, encouraging that sort of thing. We had a very good Peace Corps Assistant Director in Cali, Ed Corr, who has gone on to be Ambassador to several countries. In fact, I think he's still in the Service. Ed Corr was a very able Foreign Service Officer who had been detailed to the Peace Corps and was operating the Cali,

Colombia program. He set up a program of MBAs, and had about 12 or 15 Peace Corps volunteers, all with MBAs, Master's of Business Administration, to try to help with business and industrial development in the Cali area. It was quite successful.

I can remember one fellow who helped in setting up a packing plant for hams and bacon and that sort of thing. They were an imaginative, bright bunch—most MBAs are—and they did some good work down there. A couple of them, after they left the Peace Corps, stayed on in Colombia. I never knew how they made out, but they did stay on.

Q: What were American business interests in Colombia at the time?

STEVENSON: We had a group there, all right, because we met once a month. American representatives of American business met with the Ambassador in the residence, and they came from Cali and from Medellin as well as from the Bogota area. Goodyear was there. What are some of the other ones? It's been a long time. Price Waterhouse and one or two of the other big accounting firms. Union Carbide had a big plant down there. Let me see if I can remember some of the others—Colgate Palmolive, several of the pharmaceutical firms. So American industry was down there.

Q: Sometimes it's said that American interest, particularly in Latin America, is driven by our business investments and all that.

STEVENSON: That's an old clich#, Stu.

Q: This is the reason I want to ask. Did you find that sometimes we'd say, "We want to do this," but that might hurt the relations of ITT or Union Carbide?

STEVENSON: Never. I don't think that really happened after World War II. I used to hear it often in Costa Rica, where the United Fruit Company was very big and had been very big, and I think before World War II, it's true that the United Fruit Company could make or break regimes in Central America, where they had big interests. I think probably in

Honduras, more than once they said, “We want so and so elected,” and he was. But after World War II, that really changed. The governments in Central America got control and it was never really true in South America. I think to a lesser extent, there might have been occasionally some cases in Central America. But even though United Fruit (now Chiquita) was very big in Costa Rica, as well as Standard Fruit (now Dole), they never wagged the dog, ever.

Q: How about the American Embassy, though? Were you aware of pressure, you might say, from American business interest to get us to do this or that, that might become paramount—were you ever aware of the embassy being pressured by American businesses?

STEVENSON: Never pressured. I can remember talking with business interests in Colombia very frankly about their problem in getting their earnings out. They were having some trouble because of the shortage of dollar exchange. They were allowed to take out only a certain percentage that had relationship to their original capital investment and so forth, like ten percent per year of their total capitalization or something like that. They talked to us about that problem, but I can never remember, for example, going to the Foreign Ministry and laying about on such a problem. We may have mildly expressed our interest and hope that they would find some way for American business to get its money out, but I don't even recall that.

Q: I ask this question because in doing these interviews again and again, I ask sort of the same thing, and I usually say, “What about the pressure on us from American businesses?” and I usually get a rather blank look when somebody is trying to come back and think about this, although this is propounded in schools many times, at least as far as embassies are concerned. It's a concern, but it's certainly not major.

STEVENSON: It was not a major one. Cubans, for example, the Castro Cubans, say that the S really hit the fan in U.S.-Cuban relations when they passed their agrarian reform law,

but that's absolute nonsense. We never questioned their right to pass an agrarian reform law. All we ever said was, “Okay, you have every right to expropriate these rural and other properties.” King Ranch had a big property down there; IT&T; Ebosco; Sears & Roebuck; United Fruit had big properties down there. “You have every right to expropriate them, but all we say is that they should receive prompt, adequate, and effective compensation,” which was an old Marjorie Whiteman phrase. She was ARA Legal Advisor from way back, a fine old lady. That was all we did.

But it's curious that now, according to Wayne Smith—and he agrees with me on this—the Cubans keep saying, “It was the land reform that really broke things, because you wouldn't go along with the land reform.” As far as we're concerned, that's absolute nonsense.

Q: We pushed land reform in a lot of countries.

STEVENSON: Yes. We always said, “You have a right to do it, but we just think the people whose land is taken should be compensated.”

In Colombia, I don't recall any real big American business issues, except their problem of getting their earnings out. There was some concern and problem, and they would talk to us about it. We were certainly a sympathetic shoulder, but I don't ever recall laying about or trying to put heavy pressure on the Colombians.

Q: You came from Washington as probably as much a Cuban expert as anybody could have been during these difficult times. Did you find the Colombians, particularly in official capacities, coming to you and asking about Cuba and what our view was?

STEVENSON: No, not at all. The one who did was the Russian ambassador. (Laughter) That's always amusing to me. His name was Nicolas Belous. He's now retired. He had served in Cuba, and when I got acquainted with him, I told him that I had worked on Cuban affairs. So quite frequently at cocktail parties, he'd get me off to one side and say, “What's the latest on the Cuban situation?” I always delighted in telling him, “Well, we have

hundreds of refugees pouring out every week, and our intelligence people interview them. Those that have any information, they get it. We're really very well informed on Cuba," and I'd tell him this, that, and the other thing. He'd always smile and say, "S#, s#." This was always in Spanish. So he was interested. But the Colombians didn't really show much interest in Cuba at all.

Q: What was the perspective of Cuba from our embassy in Bogota? Did we see it as a threat to problems in Colombia?

STEVENSON: The first couple of years I was there, there was some thought that they might be aiding the ELN. That was the Ej#rcito de Liberaci#n Nacional. There was some thought that the Cubans might have been aiding them, but about the time I got there, and for the next couple of years, our intelligence people never could really confirm that they were feeding anything in. We had the feeling that they had cut them off. Cuba, of course, was quite willing to promote insurrection in these countries, but where they didn't feel it was going to get anywhere, I mean, their resources were limited—I think they really pulled back in Colombia just because it wasn't getting anywhere.

Q: You were dealing as Charg# and also as DCM. Was it easy to deal with the Colombian authorities?

STEVENSON: Yes, I would say that it was. I was Charg# for almost a year out of the four years I was there, one long stretch of eight months and then two other stretches. So I got quite well acquainted with the Foreign Ministers. Hernan Zea was the first one, and I got to know him quite well.

I think an interesting thing was when the first Panama Canal Treaty was about to go through in '68, if I'm not mistaken, we suddenly got a rocket cable from the Department saying, "Please go in and tell the Colombians that we are abrogating the canal treaty on Wednesday of next week." This was like a Friday we got this cable. I was astounded. Ambassador Carlson was away, and I was in charge for the moment. I was astounded,

and I cabled back and said, “I will want instructions to do it.” I wanted to be instructed to go in and tell them this. So I got back a cable saying, “You are instructed to go in and tell them that we are abrogating the canal treaty three days from now.”

Colombia had a little piece of that Canal Treaty. Their naval vessels were authorized free transport of the Canal, and their goods had some rights on the railroad. Well, in point of fact, the only thing that they ever used occasionally and benefitted from was occasional passage of a Colombian naval vessel through the canal, and they didn't have to pay any tolls. But we were telling them that we were going to abrogate this treaty. And they had never been consulted, which I find really an oversight.

So I went over on Saturday morning and talked to Zea. He received me in his study, in his dressing gown. He broke out the Scotch, even though it was morning. The more we talked about it, the madder he got—not at me personally, but at the whole idea that we were asking them on such short notice to agree to the abrogation of the Treaty. He said, “It's got to go to the Congress. The Congress has to agree to that before we can do such a thing.” So by the time I left, he was pretty upset. I was trying all the arguments that the Department had given me about how, in the long run, it was in the best interests of Latin America.

Q: Did you buy these arguments?

STEVENSON: Well, yeah, I think probably I did. In fact, I was in favor of ending the Canal Treaty if we could work out a sensible way, and this seemed to be a pretty sensible way of doing it. Now I'm not so sure, with Noriega, but back then it seemed a reasonable thing. I think I made a pretty good case, but I thought we were just woefully off base with the Colombians, even though their interests were small.

So I went back to the office and fired a cable up and said, “You'd better think about sending a special envoy bearing gifts if you want the Colombians to agree to the abrogation of that treaty on such short notice.” I suggested Ambassador Bonsal, who was

very highly regarded in Colombia because he had stood up to General Rojas Pinilla, the former dictator. Actually, Bonsal told me the Department did contact him, but you recall that Torrijos, two days later, led a revolt and overthrew the government. It was one of the Arias family in power—I've forgotten whether it was Roberto or Arnulfo.

Q: This is in Panama.

STEVENSON: In Panama. There was a revolt, and Torrijos took over, so the whole canal business was suspended.

But in that cable I said, “One of the things we might do,” trying to suggest something as a sweetener, “would be to agree to relinquish our claims to Quita Sue#o, Roncador, and Serrana,” which were little banks closer to Central America than to Colombia, but to which Colombia claimed title from old Spanish deeds and grants, and which we claimed under the Guano Act. The Guano Act—I think it was 1910—more or less, as I recall, said something to the effect that any little atoll or islet where we have collected Guano, nobody else has bothered us, and we've collected the Guano, is U.S. property. So we had this claim to Quita Sue#o, which is a great long reef about 20 miles long, and Serrana, which is two or three acres, and Roncador, which is another little islet.

I remembered that I had mentioned this. It must have been a year later, although the Liberals were still in power and Lopez Michelson was acting Foreign Minister, everything was quiet and we didn't have anything on the U.S.-Colombia agenda. I thought to myself, “Jesus, we really ought to settle this before somebody discovers oil on one of these things, and then we'll really have a donnybrook.” The Colombians clearly had the best claim to it. “We ought to negotiate a treaty and settle this thing.”

So on my own, I mentioned it to Lopez Michelson. I said, “Don't you think maybe we should? Everything's quiet now. We don't have any problems. Wouldn't this be a good time to settle this question of sovereignty over these little atolls and islets?”

He said, “Yeah, I think it would.”

So that's what started the negotiations, and it led to a treaty which was signed in 1972 and ratified in 1982, if I'm not mistaken.

Q: It shows you how long these things take.

STEVENSON: Yes. The main obstacle to the final ratification were fishermen from New Orleans who fished for red snapper on these banks. The Treaty provides that U.S. fishing rights will not be barred. In other words, they can still go there and fish and there will be no restriction on it. But it did get settled. I've always been kind of pleased that I started it—Charlie Meyer, who was Assistant Secretary, when I came up on home leave about 1970, I guess it was, said to me, “How did we ever get into this, anyway?” I didn't quite have the nerve to tell him. (Laughter)

Q: That shows you that you shouldn't leave diplomats alone in quiet times. Again, this is part of the diplomatic process, trying to settle some things which are obviously “settlable,” but only in quiet times, that you use this time to take care of some things where there is not a lot of heat or political capital to be made by taking a stand.

STEVENSON: You could never do it right now, for example. You could never do it with all that drug business. So I agree with you. I don't feel at all badly that I suggested maybe we could look at it, because I think it was a fair treaty, and our interests were covered and fully negotiated.

There's something I wanted to tell you. Virgilio Barco, who is now president of Colombia, the one who was up here about six weeks ago talking to President Bush, was Mayor of Bogota when I was there. I used to talk to him from time to time. I found him a very capable, honest sort of fellow, not very colorful, but capable and honest. I wish him every success. He's a Liberal, of course, and he was elected to succeed a Conservative, rather

a kind of Liberal/Conservative. Yes, that's right. So they have been alternating just in the democratic process.

Q: I'd like to go back and sort of pin this down about the Panama Treaty. Colombia was part of the treaty.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: The United States and, obviously, Panama. Was this an oversight? It sounds like a very arrogant thing to do, to all of a sudden say, "Well, we're going to abrogate the treaty," maybe for good and sound reasons, when there are arguments to be made and you can consult and say, "Let's redo this treaty."

STEVENSON: I think it was a bad oversight. I really think that's what it was. The Colombian interest was very small. As I say, it involved just a few things: free passage for their naval vessels, and there was something about shipping freight over the railroad, but it wasn't done anymore, so it didn't mean anything. It was a very small part of the Treaty with Panama. But there are sensibilities, and the Foreign Minister was really outraged that we expected him to abrogate it on two days' notice. I think it was terrible. That's why I asked for instructions. I wasn't going to do it unless I had instructions.

Q: This is the sort of thing that makes us look like the overbearing gringos.

STEVENSON: We were saved by Torrijos on that one. There would have been a real stinko on that one, and we would have had to do a lot to placate the Colombians. Every enemy we had down there would have been agitating and yakking about it.

Q: It happened before it had a chance to really surface and generate that.

STEVENSON: Yes. I was told the new Canal Treaty was in suspension. As I recall, I probably just telephoned Zea and said, “Forget the whole thing. Torrijos has taken over and we've pulled back on the Treaty.”

Q: The Nixon Administration took over in 1969. Did you feel any change in how we looked at Latin America from the Johnson Administration?

STEVENSON: I guess that's when Charlie Meyer came in as Assistant Secretary, isn't it, in the Nixon Administration? He was a damn good Assistant Secretary. I thought he did a fine job. He'd been with Sears and Roebuck, and came in there. I'm trying to think who preceded him. Jack Vaughn, for one, but I think there was somebody in between Jack Vaughn and Charlie Meyer.

I would say that in Colombia, we noticed very little difference. Things went along just about —

Q: This was not like a major change.

STEVENSON: No.

Q: Covey Oliver.

STEVENSON: Yes, Covey Oliver.

Q: We had almost a rotating—

STEVENSON: Covey Oliver was Assistant Secretary, wasn't he? He had been Ambassador to Colombia. I think he came back and was Assistant Secretary, but he was under the Democrats and Lyndon Johnson. Probably Charlie Meyer took over from Covy Oliver.

Q: Yes, he did. There was a period of very rapid change in that office of Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: The new ambassador was Jack Vaughn. Could you describe him as a person? He's been around quite a bit.

STEVENSON: Yes, he has. Well, a colorful character, if you've never met him. Some day you might want to do an interview with him.

Q: I'm hoping to.

STEVENSON: He's a very colorful guy and very able. Speaks Spanish fluently. Has a heavy quotient of bullshit. You just allow for that, and there's a lot of good stuff there, too. He was quite passionately disposed to help the little guy in Latin America. He didn't have much patience with the Colombian upper classes. I think probably he offended some of them more than once on social occasions. But he got around the country widely and he met with the union leaders and leaders of agrarian organizations. Even though Jack was always portrayed as a Kennedy admirer—he said he was a Republican but he was a very liberal Republican—you'd have to say that—in the attitudes that he took.He worked much with the Peace Corps. He'd been Director of the Peace Corps, of course, so he took a special interest, I'd say. I'll never forget how angry he got when he saw two or three volunteers in a group that burned the American flag down by the Embassy Chancery. It was the Vietnam thing. He got very angry and called in the Peace Corps Director, and told him if he saw any more Peace Corps volunteers down there where the American flag was being burned, they were going to be shipped home immediately. That stopped that. I was with him on that one.

The Vietnam thing again, incidentally, one time Hernan Zea, in a speech at Christmas time, I guess it was, or maybe the New Year's or some damn thing, when the diplomatic

corps was all present, made some very sarcastic references about U.S. involvement in Vietnam, so much so that I almost walked out. I was really mad. I was Charg# at the time. I turned to the Brazilian Ambassador and said something to him about how annoyed I was about it.

So the next day, without waiting, I just went over to see Zea, and I said, “You know, this is a very difficult problem for us back in the United States, and we're struggling with it. My son has just registered for the draft. I really didn't appreciate those remarks about the U.S. involvement in Vietnam.” He was quite apologetic. He took it very well, actually.

About a week after that, I ran into President Lleras Restrepo at some other social gathering. I never saw him very often, but I had talked to him a couple of times. He knew who I was. I chatted with him and I said, “Perhaps your Foreign Minister mentioned to you that I came to see him the other day about his remarks on U.S. involvement in Vietnam.”

He said, “Ah, yes. Entiendo que es un punto muy neuralgico.” (”I understand that it's a very neuralgic point.”) They never, ever, said another word about Vietnam. No official in the Colombian administration ever talked about Vietnam after that. So I really felt that did some good. It was a tough enough problem for us without flak from a foreign country we were helping in a large way.

Q: You mentioned something that I think would be interesting to talk about. You say Jack Vaughn did not get overly involved or sympathetic to the upper class in Latin America. I have never served in Latin America, but I understand that in many of these places, the upper class often controls things and is very powerful, particularly because of its wealth, and there is little relationship with the people down below. From your impression, looking at the Foreign Service, do we get captured by this class, because of their social abilities and all this? Or is it a problem?

STEVENSON: I think it's a problem you have to watch. I think it can happen, because many times they are very attractive people, very well educated, just attractive in every

way, a lot of them. It was certainly true in Chile, that Chilean upper classes are delightful people, very cosmopolitan, witty, and bright. But I think the thing is changing in Latin America. For example, many of these people in Chile had become Christian Democrats and were working fervently to try to change things, to better the lot of the inguilinos and the poor, rotos (urban poor), in Chile, the very poor elements.

They were working hard. I think in Colombia, an increasing number of upper class Colombians were concerned about the social and economic situation, so that you did have a good many upper class people who were working hard for social programs, a lot of times with the Catholic Church. You still had real reactionary business types, you know. I shouldn't say just the business types, because there were many reactionary landowners, too—really throwbacks. But this social ferment of raising the standard of living and bettering the lot of the lower class has really bubbled a lot in Latin America.

When I was in Chile in 1980, I saw there were big changes in the rural countryside, and I didn't see any more of the barefooted inguilinos that I remembered from my time in Chile, which was '62 to '65. In 1980, I didn't see any of them. They were wearing their blue jeans and sneakers, but they were better off, no doubt about it. They used to look so miserable in their rags and bare feet, standing in the cold mud, because it gets cold down there in the wintertime.

Eduardo Frei, the Christian Democrat who was elected in 1964, had a big program to try and help the rural poor, and, I think, with a lot of success.

What I see now, however, despite the success, and there has been growth in Latin America and there has been betterment of the living standards of little people, is that the gap has widened because we've grown so much more. A lot of their progress has been overwhelmed by population growth. They've had such a rapid increase in their population that it's very hard for the per capita standard of living to grow very much.

Q: Governor Rockefeller made a visit?

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Could you tell what happened? This was in 1969.

STEVENSON: Oh, God, yes! That fiasco when President Nixon asked him to go down, and a group of distinguished people to go down.

Q: At the time he was the governor of New York.

STEVENSON: Yes, and President Nixon had just come in. He appointed this high-level group to take a survey of Latin America and tell him what should be done about our Latin America policy. God, it was a high-powered proposition. Advance men came down and told us just where they wanted the lectern placed and all that kind of crap. They are miserable people to deal with. Rockefeller himself was very pleasant.

But this was set up so that Governor Rockefeller and some of the key people would talk to the president of the country without the presence of the ambassador. Now, some ambassadors wouldn't stand for it. They said, “Nothing doing. If he goes in to see the president, I'm going with him, and I insist,” and should have, and did insist. I don't think Ray Carlson insisted, and I don't criticize him for it, because I don't think I myself pressed him. But the GOC indicated to us that it wanted him present, so I think he was always there.

So they came in and the head of IBM was along. I've forgotten his name. It was a high-powered group with their own plane, who toured around. They got a lot of good suggestions, I think, and not one damn thing came of it. Not one thing. It was a complete waste of money and time.

Q: There wasn't a mob attack or something like that at that time?

STEVENSON: No, not that I recall. I found Governor Rockefeller—I met him two or three times, and my wife and I took him out to the plane. Again, I don't know why that happened, but we did. He and his wife were very nice, very pleasant. I would have liked to have seen the report. I think it was probably a pretty good report.

Q: Did you have the feeling that everything was focused on Vietnam? Because Nixon obviously came in with probably as much expertise and self-learned knowledge of world affairs as any president in history.

STEVENSON: Yes. And some firsthand knowledge of Latin America, too.

Q: Yes.

STEVENSON: Latin America was distinctly back burner, and continues to be, except for the—well, look at the OAS. We haven't even paid our quota in the OAS for years now.

Q: What was the situation with Jack Vaughn? Did he leave the post?

STEVENSON: He was there only a year, and then he resigned from the Foreign Service.

Q: Why?

STEVENSON: I think personal problems. I think he was getting a divorce. He resigned on his own accord.

Q: Oh, I see. This wasn't because of policy.

STEVENSON: He wasn't too happy with policy. I will have to say that. But it was no big crisis. I think it was largely the problem of the forthcoming divorce.

Then Len Saccio came down. He had been DCM in Buenos Aires, a very competent guy, a lawyer, had been DCM in El Salvador, DCM in Buenos Aires. I respected him very much.

He was a good ambassador. I only served under him for about six months, but he was good.

Q: I talked to him yesterday. He's going to interview himself.

We might as well go on to your next assignment. You came back to Washington in 1971, and you were country director for Mexico.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Mexican-American relations have always been sort of troubled right from the beginning. We have so many joint interests, yet the countries are, in a way, so dissimilar.

STEVENSON: That's right.

Q: Unlike, say, with Canada, where we have problems, but there's much more of an easy meshing.

STEVENSON: That's right.

Q: Could you describe, in 1971, what the Mexican-American relationship was like?

STEVENSON: You're absolutely right in what you say. It wasn't tense, but there were strains in it. There were definitely strains in our relationship. The principal strain then, that seemed to overshadow all others, was the salinity of the Colorado River, from which, by treaty, they got a share of their irrigation water. Their water was getting saltier and saltier, and they were blaming the U.S. for it, and quite rightly so, because it was largely runoff from a certain project called the Wellton-Mohawk that was increasing the salinity in the water that was going to Mexico. They had increasing acreage going out of production because of salt damage.

Q: Were we disputing the claim that we were causing the problem?

STEVENSON: Well, yeah, but not very hard, because most of us believed we were. But there was some evidence that the land they were irrigating would have salted up eventually, anyway, because some land will, you know. You irrigate it for a few years. It's happening in Egypt, too, I understand, from the Aswan water. You irrigate a few years and it brings the salt up to the surface. There was some of that. But there was no question but that the water was getting saltier and saltier that we were delivering to Mexico. So that was a thing that was on the front burner.

Emilio Rabasa was the Mexican Foreign Minister, a very likeable guy who had studied in the States and used to come up here and talk to Charlie Meyer. We could always talk to the Mexicans, that's for sure, and the Mexican ambassador, Juan Jos# DeOllogui, and I became very good friends. They were always very frank, though, where they disagreed with us. The principal area at that time was the salinity question. On drugs, they were cooperating pretty well.

Dick Kleindienst, the Attorney General who got in trouble, got along well with the Mexican Attorney General, and took a great interest in the drug problem. I went down with Kleindienst and a group from his shop to Ciudad Ju#rez for delivery of some planes to the Mexicans to help them in their effort to control marijuana and heroin at that time, poppy-growing and marijuana. The Mexicans had confiscated a huge pile of marijuana, a great heap of the stuff, and the culmination of the whole visit was going to be the burning of that pile.

We had a luncheon, and Kleindienst spoke to them, and spoke well. I had a lot of respect for Kleindienst. After the lunch, I heard this very nice trumpet playing in a mariachi band that had been playing for us, and the Mexicans were all kind of tittering and looking. I went over, and damn if there wasn't old Dick playing the trumpet in that mariachi band, playing it very well. It turned out that he'd grown up as a poor boy in Arizona and had learned to

play trumpet and Mexican music. I thought at the time, God, he would have made a terrific ambassador to Latin America.

But anyway, we got to the marijuana. This is kind of a good story. I'll tell you this. We got to the marijuana, and it had been soaked in gasoline. I took a great whiff of it, and I thought, “Jesus! I'm going to get back pretty far.” So I backed up about as far as I could get, and I was standing next to the governor of Chihuahua. They handed this torch to Kleindienst, and he marched up and tossed it on, and it went “WOOOMPH!” and singed off his eyebrows. (Laughter) Then it sent a great towering black column of smoke to the sky. As this happened, the governor of Chihuahua said, “Ay! Como me da pena quemar todo eso!” “Oh, how it pains me to burn all that!” (Laughter) He didn't know that somebody who knew Spanish was right there.

Then Kleindienst talked to the Mexicans. They were cheering him. He was giving them this clenched fist salute in response. I said, “Mr. Attorney General, I think you've been doing very well,” but—

Q: You're holding your fist in the air.

STEVENSON: Like the communists.

Q: Basically the communists' salute.

STEVENSON: I said, “You're giving them the communists' salute.”

“Oh, am I?” (Laughter)

I said, “That's the commie salute when you do this.”

He said, “Thanks a lot,” and meant it.

I liked Kleindienst. He was a very personable guy. I was sorry he got into trouble, because he was a real self-made guy and very bright, very able.

I wanted to tell you about salinity, how that got settled, because we did settle the salinity thing. President Echeverr#a made a state visit to Nixon, just the way Salinas did to Bush. The principal thing he brought up was the salinity question. So we got a directive to do something about it. We talked it over in ARA. I think Jack Crimmins was Assistant Secretary. I know Bob Hurwitch was Deputy handling the Mexican area. It was decided to name a special negotiator, and they brought in old Brownell, Herb Brownell, who'd been attorney general under President Eisenhower. And what a nice old man he was, and what an able, true lawyer. God, he did a good job on that.

Before that, I had gone out and met with the Basin States Committee, which was a shrewd bunch of people from the basin states that have rights to the Colorado water. I must say they impressed the hell out of me, how able these state officials were when it came to their interest in water. They had some good people.

Q: Water is the name of the game in those states, more than anything else.

STEVENSON: It sure is. And they weren't inclined to give the Mexicans an inch, I must say. I kept saying, “We'll have to give the Mexicans some kind of water that relates in some reasonable way to the quality of water that our farmers get.”

“Oh, no, we can't do that.”

Well, Brownell kept working on it, and he was a savvy old boy. He kept working on it. In the end, the thing was settled, as I thought it would be, saying that the quality of Mexican water would have a direct relationship to the quality of water that our farmers get in the Imperial Valley, and it could be like 100 parts per million more salty. I think that's what it says, up to 100 parts per million saltier than the American water.

I went down to Mexico City before the Echeverria visit was set up, just before, and the Ambassador, McBride, asked me to a luncheon, and he had the Foreign Minister, Rabasa, there. I had hoped that they wouldn't bring up salinity when Echeverr#a visited the states, because we didn't know what the hell we were going to do. But Ambassador Bob McBride brought it up at the luncheon. Rabasa turned to me and gave me a great song and dance about what we were doing to the Mexicans with our salty water, really laid it on hard. Finally, I said to him, “Well, ever since the days of the pharaohs in Egypt, the man who is farther down the river gets dirtier or saltier water. That's historical.” I didn't know this for sure at all. (Laughter) But I figured it might fly.

He said, “Well, yeah. Well, all right. All right.” So that's when I was convinced that they would accept somewhat saltier water, as long as it had a direct relationship to the quality of water that our people were getting. That's the way it was ultimately solved. So salinity of the Colorado River water going to Mexico is no longer a problem. It's still a problem for us, in that the way we're doing this is by cutting this runoff from Wellton-Mohawk with some good water. We're supposed to erect a desalinization plant to process this runoff from Wellton-Mohawk, but I don't think it's yet in operation.

Q: You mentioned how sometimes when there are these problems, in most state visits, there's usually one major question that often is brought up, where the two presidents of the country or king or whoever, will come up and say, “What about so and so?” And they will say, “Why don't we solve this thing?” And it does tend to bring things to a head and maybe get one or two things off the agenda that have been perking for many years.

STEVENSON: I agree with you, and that's exactly what happened on salinity. That's exactly what happened on the Chamizal dispute with Mexico. That was earlier, where this piece of land which the Colorado River had isolated when it altered its course, was left in dispute between El Paso and Ciudad Ju#rez. Tom Mann was Ambassador at the time in Mexico City. Then the Chamizal was settled. The Mexican president had come up and he

had mentioned that. We more or less got a directive from the White House: “Let's see if we can settle this salinity thing. Let's get at it and settle it.” And we did.

Q: Were there any other major problems that impacted on you?

STEVENSON: Yes. The immigration thing was very sensitive, the illegal part. The Mexicans have always had kind of a strange line, I think, on their “wetbacks.” They don't, of course, call them that. They're the illegal Mexicans that come into this country. Namely, that we should treat them in some special way, as if they had some sort of a right to come into this country. So it's very difficult to talk to them about doing something about the illegal Mexicans. They haven't been uncooperative, but they haven't been cooperative either. In other words, they just haven't done anything to stop the illegals from coming over.

I went down with a fellow from the Department of Justice. He's now the dean of the law school at Cornell. His name escapes me for the moment, but he's a very able guy. He was a Deputy Attorney General. We went down to Mexico City and had a meeting with them on the illegals. The main point they made was, “Don't erect any sort of devices that you've developed in Vietnam along the border as detection devices. This would be wrong to introduce anything out of the Vietnam conflict with regard to this problem.” I always thought that was kind of nonsensical, that we had every right to put up any sort of detection device we wanted to prevent illegals from coming in if it didn't hurt anybody. I think they were referring to infrared sensors.

Q: I think they did that, and also pressure sensors, too.

STEVENSON: Yes. That type of thing.

Q: Which we have now.

STEVENSON: Yes, that type of thing. They were very adamant about our not introducing the Vietnam techniques into that Mexican border problem. We did come up with some

recommendations on the problem, which were pretty much all covered in this recent legislation about the amnesty and forgiving a certain number of them, then trying to tighten up the border. I'm not so sanguine about what's going to happen.

Q: As a practical measure, to turn it around for the Mexicans, how can they say, "We're going to try to keep our people out"? It's our problem, not their problem.

STEVENSON: It keeps the pressure off them. And with their population growing at such a tremendous rate, you know, until Echeverr#a came along, and for the first half of his administration, they wouldn't hear of any family planning in Mexico. But by the last two years of Echeverr#a's term, he had agreed that they needed to introduce family planning. But it's that recent that they've had family planning in Mexico.

Q: At your level, were we thinking in terms of pushing family planning?

STEVENSON: No, no. No, we weren't. But some of us were mighty happy to see them get onto it. Echeverr#a was very interested in getting a lot of free scholarships for Mexican students in this country, and Bob McBride went along with the cockeyed, fanciful scheme that has never panned out and no longer exists. I worked untold hours on that, only to discover that we really didn't need a special scholarship scheme for Mexican students, because we had thousands of them studying here now under the present setup. We had literally thousands of Mexicans studying in U.S. universities.

Q: How did you find the embassy? Was it well staffed? The embassy and the consular posts.

STEVENSON: I didn't think we had a very good embassy in Mexico City. I didn't think they were as informed as they should have been. I thought they were too tied to their desks. They didn't get around the country. Mexico is a big country, and you need to get some feedback from the whole country into your political reporting. I didn't think we were getting it at all.

Q: Did you try to ginger them up?

STEVENSON: Yes, I did. After McBride, we got ambassadors who did. I know John Jova did. But under McBride, it was pretty bad. I won't comment any further on that one. There are some things there that were strange. Of course, Ambassador McBride is dead now.

Q: As a country director dealing with a country which is of major importance to the United States, but often overlooked, obviously there are always difficulties with Mexico. How did you deal with the embassy?

STEVENSON: ARA, I would have to say, was pretty content to let me make contact with the Ambassador and deal directly with him on many things I did as Country Director. On most ordinary things, I dealt right with the Ambassador, like the problem of the Tijuana sewage runoff that, until very recently, was causing big problems, because their septic system, or their sewage system, wouldn't handle the overflow. It wouldn't handle all the volume. So the overflow would go into the Tijuana River, and then it would pollute some of the beaches in San Diego and so forth. We talked about that a number of times, what could be done about it.

When I had something like salinity, that went up to the Assistant Secretary and then to the White House eventually. Then Brownell was appointed, and so forth. But a lot of the day-to-day stuff was just handled at the Country Director level, dealing directly with the Mexican Embassy. When Echeverr#a came up, I drafted the communique jointly with a member of the Mexican delegation, and we just sat down in my office there in State, drafted the communique, then cleared it with the front office, cleared it with the White House, and that was the way it worked. I dealt directly with Dick Kleindienst, too, who was then Deputy Attorney General and with the Director of Customs, for example.

Q: Much more so than many other countries.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: You're trying to figure out Mexican-American relations. If you have a problem, say, with concern about how good the reporting is—you mentioned that you didn't feel the embassy, under Ambassador McBride, the officers were getting out enough. Did you have to depend on their reporting, or would you get your information on which you would be making judgments from other sources?

STEVENSON: Of course, we certainly read the press. We got papers from Mexico City, too, and we looked at the Mexican press, as well. But we depended a great deal on the reporting from the Embassy. That was our principal source, certainly.

For border stuff, we got a lot from the Border and Water Commission. You know that the State Department—the man who runs the Border and Water Commission is under State. When you go down to El Paso, you are startled when you see these huge warehouses with earth-moving equipment and Caterpillars and bulldozers and it says “Department of State.” Because the Border and Water Commission does come under State.

They supply a lot of useful information about stuff along the border, not only pollution and so forth, but the juvenile delinquency problem, which was very bad in Texas with young juveniles coming across into Texas and stealing and getting caught, then deported, coming back, coming back, and then finally going to Texas reform school and costing Texas $15,000, $20,000 a year to keep these kids in reform school. That's just an example.

What were some other areas? Oh, the Kickapoo Indians. Some of this comes later, when I was working on that special commission designated as the Border Relations Action Group. But that's the sort of thing that the Commissioner, Joe Friedkin, was very helpful on. Joe Friedkin always had on his staff a Foreign Service officer there in El Paso, who followed

the actions of the Border and Water Commission. They gave us much useful information about the border.

One of the things about that Mexican border that has struck me hard is that the people in the Distrito Federal, the federal district, the people in central Mexico, look at the border with different eyes than we do. Many of the Mexicans along the border would like to have less border and closer relations with the U.S., and for example they don't mind U.S. TV coming down; they don't mind their Spanish becoming Spanglish. But the people down further south do, and they are not about to yield too much ground in the sense of opening up that border to U.S. interests.

Q: Did you have direct relations with the governors of the various Mexican districts along the border?

STEVENSON: No. I did with some of the mayors in some of the towns. In McAllen, Texas, the mayor there was very active, trying to get a bridge built, or another bridge built. He came in to see me. But on the Mexican side, no. I didn't.

Q: How did you feel our consulates were used?

STEVENSON: Well, they were primarily for protection and visa operations, but we used to get some useful reporting from them, too. I can recall getting some good stuff from Tijuana and from Ciudad Ju#rez, as well.

Q: Did we have any feelings toward the government in Mexico? After all, the PRI [Party of Institutionalized Revolution] has been in there and is still there, really, since the '20s. It has obviously become a self-perpetuating institution, much more of a challenge now than it has been before within Mexico. But were we trying to say, "You don't have a democracy there," or was this not even a subject of mention or concern?

STEVENSON: It was the latter, very definitely. It was never mentioned, and the Mexicans would have resented it terribly had we done so. I think as long as PRI was running things with reasonable efficiency and in terms of U.S.-Mexican relations, as long as they weren't a problem, we weren't going to rock that boat at all. I think we were happy that PRI had knocked out the extreme left, you know. For a number of years after World War II, the extreme left continued to operate, and Lombardo Toledano—I'd almost forgotten the name—head of the Mexican labor confederation, was a communist and a very powerful figure. There were other communist figures of some weight in Mexico, and they were pretty well all subdued by the PRI setup. Their organizations just became nothing.

So, no, I'd say politically, I think we recognized that PRI was not resulting in a real democracy, but we weren't about to rock that boat. There was never anything like it. I'm interested, as you mentioned, that PRI is having some real big problems right now. This last election was a very troublesome thing.

Q: Within the State Department, you were there during a time of troubles, you might say, between the fact that the Secretary of State William Rogers, was being outdone, in many cases, by the head of the National Security Agency, Henry Kissinger. Did you feel any of this Kissinger-Rogers business?

STEVENSON: No, I didn't feel it at all. I wasn't aware of it. It never impinged on my work in any way. I thought that the White House gave very good cooperation on the salinity thing, and that was the principal problem, where we needed White House cooperation. I remember talking to Alexander Haig, assistant to Kissinger, at the time of the Echeverr#a visit, and found him very cooperative and very helpful, no problems at all. That was my only dealing with them. So I would say no. I only became more aware of the Kissinger presence later when I was in Personnel and he issued his famous GLOP, Global Outlook Program, one direct result of which was that I went to Malawi as Ambassador, instead of as DCM to Mexico, to which I had been assigned.

Q: Is there anything else we should talk about on the Mexican assignment?

STEVENSON: No, I think we've pretty well covered it. A very interesting job. Of course, after four years in Bogota and Charg#, as I mentioned before, almost one year out of the four, I had hoped to get a small embassy, so I was kind of unhappy when all I got was Country Director for Mexico, but it proved to be a good job. I enjoyed it. It was challenging and there was a lot of substance there. I didn't want to leave it. I was asked to go to Personnel. They came to me twice and twisted my arm.

Q: This was in 1973.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Why did they want you to go to Personnel?

STEVENSON: What was the name of our Ambassador who went to Sudan and was killed brutally by the terrorists? His deputy, too. They were at a party.

Q: Cleo Knoll.

STEVENSON: Yes, Cleo Knoll came to me personally and asked me if I would. He was in Personnel at the time. This was just before he went to Sudan. He came to me twice and asked me, said they needed me in Personnel, I'd never had a personnel assignment, and would I be willing to come. So in the end I said I would.

Q: What were you doing in Personnel?

STEVENSON: I was at first in charge of the Assignments Office, and after about six or eight months I was made acting Deputy Director in charge of Assignments. I carried on in that slot as one of the Deputy Directors until I went to Malawi.

Q: I've had my time in personnel, too. Personnel, in most organizations, is sort of a technical thing way off to one side and of little pertinence, and left to basically a clerical type operation. But in the Department of State, it probably is one of the most crucial elements to the Foreign Service.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Why do you think this is?

STEVENSON: For one thing, the class of people you're dealing with. Foreign Service officers are a highly educated, bright, able group of people with a certain amount of individual initiative and presence, or they wouldn't be in the Foreign Service. So you're dealing with this very—I don't mind using the word “elite.” I think it is an elite group. That requires some special handling. Then the very nature of our work all over the world and in different types of places and climates and countries and so forth, it just needs a lot of attention and handling.

I enjoyed my work chairing the Assignments Panel, which I did until I became the Acting Deputy Director. I found that a very challenging and interesting job.

Q: How would the Assignments Panel work?

STEVENSON: You had an opening somewhere, and the various sections of Personnel came in with their candidates. Frequently there would be two or three candidates that would be proposed for the job, sometimes only one, and then the Panel would review the qualifications and the suitability, and we put our “yes” or “no” on it. Sometimes there would be two or three, and individual members of the Panel proposing the candidate for the job would make the presentation of why they felt their candidate was well suited and so forth. Then the Panel would vote on it. It was a very lively, frank exchange, and people didn't

hold back. When I was Chair, I didn't try to run it in the sense of being autocratic in any way. It was a full and open discussion.

Q: What were the roles, say, of what one might call the principals of the Department of State? Would you find that they would have their favorites? Would that sort of upset the system?

STEVENSON: A couple of times that happened, much to my annoyance. Yes, it does happen still, I'm sure, even up to the Secretary of State asking for a name to be put on the promotion list. I think it was Ambassador Riddleberger that protested it vigorously. I don't know if that was when he retired or resigned or not, but he certainly protested it. I had one case when the Assistant Secretary for Europe pushed through a candidate he wanted to go to Brussels as Economic Counselor when the Senior Officer Assignments Division had recommended career officers as candidates. This was an officer, a GS, with whom he'd worked in the Department.

Q: The Civil Service.

STEVENSON: Yes. He wanted that officer to have a shot at a job abroad, and Economic Counselor, Brussels, was the position that he'd picked. Much to my chagrin, he made it stick. I got the Director General to go to the mat on it. He went to the mat on it, lost, came back to me, and took it out on me. He said, “Don't ever get me in one I'm going to lose.”

I said, “Look. You win some, you lose some, but this was one where your Senior Officer Assignments Division and myself felt that it was the wrong thing to do. We had plenty of qualified career officers for whom the Brussels job would be very interesting and they'd earned it, and they certainly should have had first crack at it, not someone who had worked all her career in the Department.” But he lost on it. I never did know what happened.

Q: Where do you lose this battle?

STEVENSON: Higher up.

Q: Sort of a vague "higher up"?

STEVENSON: Yes. I don't know. All I remember was how angry the Director General was that he'd lost, and blaming me for getting him in one he was going to lose. I expect he has since changed his mind on that one, and hopefully regrets it, because he was way off base. Where is it settled? Higher up, that's for sure.

Q: One of the things I've noticed in doing interviewing, there are a certain number of people who have reached senior rank, who seem to go from being staff assistant to one major finger in the State Department to another to another. This seems to be one of the best roads to the top, which to some others seems to be somewhat unfair, because these are felt to be people who have not earned their way. They're not in what really would be called a substantive job, although in our jargon it is a substantive job. But their responsibility is only as being the creature of somebody else. Was there any attempt in personnel, as you look at it, to sort of stop this staff assistant high road to success or not?

STEVENSON: Yes, it was galling to me that the geographic Bureaus still had so much power in Personnel. Theoretically, Personnel was supposed to make the assignments. But Assistant Secretaries, not only in geographic Bureaus, but Assistant Secretaries everywhere, their offices really had a lot of power yet. And that's how you could get one staff guy going from one staff job to another, because one Assistant Secretary would help him get another such job. A lot depends on the Director General, how much he's going to stick up for his job. But I don't think that the matter has ever been fully decided in State as to who should do it. It's a mixture now of Personnel and the geographic Bureaus and the other Bureaus doing it. Personnel does most of it, but when you get up towards the senior levels, there's a lot of input from Assistant Secretaries. Maybe that's not all bad. I don't know. But there were cases where you felt that the bureau should have stayed out of it.

I had a very—I won't mention his name; he's a friend, still is—but he came to me and wanted an assignment canceled. He was an Ambassador at the United Nations. He said, “I don't like So and So. I don't want him assigned there.”

I said, “You've got to have more than that. Just because you don't like him personally, that's not enough. He appears to be well qualified in every way. He wants to serve there. He's made a good pitch. If you don't want him, you're going to have to substantiate it in some way, in writing, not come to me.” He expected me just to kill it. I wouldn't do it. I don't know that he ever forgave me. But it still happens, I'm sure. I tried to resist it.

Q: The assignment process is almost the most important function of the State Department from a career point of view, as opposed to the promotion process, because your promotion comes from a good job. Obviously the person has to be competent, but a competent person in a job which does not have a high profile is less likely to get promoted than someone who just happens to be in the right job.

STEVENSON: The promotion system, in general, I think, is pretty damn good. I'm sure it's not perfect. I've had quite a lot of experience in recent years serving on Selection Boards as a public member, the AID Selection Boards, which run just the same way. I've been very well impressed with the results. The good people tend to end up on the top of the lists. I've seen it, and it really does work. But I would agree with you that the promotion side of it is much better worked out than the assignment side.

Q: The assignments lead to the promotions.

STEVENSON: I know it, to some extent.

Q: I've had the same experience.

STEVENSON: I don't know what the answer would be on that one. I had another very senior officer come to me and say that he didn't want a certain officer on his staff at an

embassy in Latin America, another old friend, because of moral problems, because he was living down there with his girlfriend. I told him, “Look. I can understand you're troubled, but this has got to be reflected in some piece of paper, in his EER or something. Does it affect his work? I don't care whether he's living with his girlfriend. Maybe we wouldn't like it, but if he's doing his job, this is not my concern.” Again, he was very annoyed with me and he went over my head, then, to the Director General. But I don't think he got anywhere on that one. So people do still try it.

Q: Kissinger, by this time, had come in as Secretary of State.STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: What was his impact on personnel?

STEVENSON: From where I sat, almost nothing until the famous GLOP.

Q: Can you explain how that came about?

STEVENSON: He went to Mexico City for some conference and he wasn't happy with the support he got from his State staff. I don't know details of it, whether it was justified in any way or not. All I know is he wasn't happy with the support he got from his staff. When he began talking to them, he found out that practically all of them had served only in Latin America. He got the idea that they were much too ingrown, that people weren't moving around enough and getting exposed to other cultures and problems and areas.

So he came back from that and he came out with his Global Outlook Program, and he told us in Personnel to review all assignments with that in mind. I remember we had to go back on some that were in the mill. It was a hell of a job. We spent about two or three months looking at all assignments from that standpoint. Had the officers served only in that particular area? If so, break the assignments and try to assign them somewhere else.

That was when I got nailed, because I had been asked by John Jova to come to Mexico City to be his DCM, and had agreed and was looking forward to it. The Director General

came to me—and I understood it; I never questioned this—and said, “It will be very difficult for us to send you now to Mexico City. You're primarily a Latin American hand.”

Q: One assignment in Dusseldorf.

STEVENSON: Yes, one assignment in Dusseldorf. “We're implementing this GLOP, and you're very actively involved in implementing the GLOP. It would be very awkward.”

I said, “I can understand that completely. But see if you can't parlay it into an embassy for me.” (Laughter) So that was how I ended up getting Malawi.

Q: You were nominated to be ambassador to Malawi in 1974. You served there until 1978. Could you explain what the situation was in Malawi when you were there?

STEVENSON: Yes. Of course, Malawi is of very little substantive interest to the United States, almost no substantive problems there. We had about 300 missionaries in the country, and that was largely the American presence, plus British American Tobacco Company had a few people, because Malawi is a big producer of bright leaf cigarette tobacco and dark fired tobacco.When I got there, of course, President Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who is still president, was in full control, and he is a benevolent dictator for the majority of Malawians. But for some, he's a cruel, cruel dictator. He hates the Jehovah's Witnesses with a passion, and they get very rough treatment. Other African presidents have had problems with Jehovah's Witnesses, so he's not alone in this, but his reaction is pretty rough. Q: Any Americans?

STEVENSON: No. The American Jehovah's Witnesses had long been expelled. They'd been out of the country. So these were the nationals.

Q: You must have breathed a sign of relief.

STEVENSON: Oh, yeah, that there were no Americans involved. President Banda expelled people very quickly. He gave 48 hours to get out of the country, and that was

that, and he did it for very trivial things. In one case, we did have an American contractor there. They were building roads under an AID loan. We did have a couple of big AID loans there when I got there in '74, to build highways. We didn't have much of any other AID program.

We had built their Bunda Agricultural College, but we were out of that, and that was because of the first Jehovah's Witnesses' trouble when two or three of them were beaten to death on the property of the Bunda Agricultural College, and the American AID-appointed Director of the college had marched right in to the Governor and in effect said, “I won't have this. Killing these people on Bunda premises must stop,” and he was given 48 hours to leave the country. So that was our last—well, there was an American advisor there, but he wasn't under AID. He was hired by Bunda. But the Director had gone.

So they were building highways. The manager in the country, an American, picked up some “subversive literature,” in other words, some literature critical of President Banda, from one of the truck drivers who had come back with some equipment from Tanzania and Zambia, I guess. So he turned it in to the Malawian police, and was immediately hauled in and asked where he got it. He told them where he had gotten it, but nevertheless, for the fact that he had done this, he was given 48 hours to leave the country. So the American company representative came to me and said, “He's a damn good foreman and there's no reason in the world to expel him. Can't we get him back?”

I said, “I'll try to do the best I can.” So I went to see the president's secretary and talked to him about it and reviewed the whole thing. I said, “Rather than expel the man, I would have thought that you would have thanked him because he was trying to be cooperative and turn this stuff over to you. Isn't there any possibility you could let him back?” He'd been gone then about two weeks.

And the Secretary turned to me and said, “Well, I understand what you've told me, but, no, we can't let him back. To let him back would be to admit that our President was wrong.” (Laughter) And that's the way the country was run.

Q: Did you have any relations with President Banda?

STEVENSON: Very good, as a matter of fact. We hit it off fine. He loved to talk about the States. He had been educated here at Wilberforce Academy in Ohio, and then he'd gone to Indiana U. for two years, and he would have finished at Indiana, but a professor at the University of Chicago was looking for somebody who knew Chinyanza. That was the language of that area. He was doing a study of it, and a professor friend of his at Indiana had said, “We have a student here, Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Maybe he could come over to Chicago and help you.” So he transferred to Chicago for his junior and senior years, and helped this professor with Chinyanza. (Now called Chichewa)

As a result, he is a great grammarian in the language, just as a Latin fellow might be really good at Latin. At the same time, he doesn't speak it so fluently anymore. And all of his speeches in Malawi are in English. He speaks in English and has standing beside him a translator who translates everything he says into Chichewa. Every now and then he will correct the translator and the crowd will all titter and laugh when he says, “You should have said, 'Okoli maluna, not so and so.'” And he'll tell why. But nevertheless, he speaks in English.

He's an interesting old man. He runs the country efficiently. Malawi is one of the best run of the black African countries, not any question. But he can be cruel.

After I left, two of the ministers were shot by the police, two of the ministers whom I knew quite well, and one who had given the farewell address when I left. They were both assassinated by the police. That's left a pretty bitter taste in my mouth. But the old man did like me.

One time they had picked up one of our staff members, a Malawian staff member, and they'd put him in jail. He was a rather naive young man who worked for our library. We had two libraries there in Malawi that were very heavily patronized by the Malawian students. This young fellow had been approached by a South African white communist and asked if he had a certain book. He'd met him at a meeting of librarians. The South African asked him if he had such and such a book? And he'd told him he did and that he'd mail him a copy. He didn't know anything about this white South African. So he mailed him a copy of the book, and that got him into correspondence, and the Malawian police were watching this. From South African intelligence, they knew that this guy to whom he had written was a communist. So they arrested him.

It took me a while to figure all this out, but I went to see the old man. We were under some heat from USIA to get him out, and I said, “You know, I'm going back on consultation, and I want to try to get some help for Malawi. I have a problem, because you're holding this fellow.” I went over what I've just told you. I thought I was doing a good job of it, but the old man drew back in his chair. He always received you one on one in this nice office that he had. He said, “What? Don't try to blackmail me! I don't need your aid. You can take your aid and stuff it! No way will I take action based on what you've told me.”

Well, I was, naturally, quite taken aback, but I said, “Well, Your Excellency, you know, I'm really on the spot on this thing. If you can't do it for any other reason, would you do it for me personally?”

He looked at me. “All right. For you I'll do it.” (Laughter) I mean, that was it. He runs the place like an old-fashioned African chief. Fear and respect is what he wants. But if you work with him, you can get along fine.

Q: You are saying that our economic interests were minor. Did we have any other political interests in the area?

STEVENSON: No. This is what made it pretty dull for me after being at very politically active posts for most of my life. We don't have any political interests there at all. Since I've left, I think an oil company is doing some oil exploration there. I had wondered that none of them had done it before. But we had some professors there. There is that beautiful big lake, Lake Malawi, which is bigger than Lake Erie. That's a big lake. It's a beautiful, pristine body of water. We had professors from Princeton studying there, studying the lake and its marine life. UNDP had some programs. Q: Could you swim in it or was there bilharzia?

STEVENSON: No, there wasn't bilharzia in the lake. You could swim in the lake. And none of our adults got bilharzia. Some of the children got it, and we thought maybe they got it from playing in the puddles at the edge of the lake. That type of thing. But in the lake itself, where you had wave action and sandy bottoms, you didn't have bilharzia.

Q: I take it that when you were dealing with Malawi, you dealt with Banda, and that was it.

STEVENSON: Yes, that was it.

Q: The foreign ministry was not much of an operative appendage to the government.

STEVENSON: We used to see them, and they wanted us to go through them to the President. But when I presented my credentials, the President said, “If you ever need to see me on any important business, don't hesitate to contact me directly.” Well, I didn't abuse that, but on the few occasions when I did need to see him urgently, I didn't bother going through the Foreign Office. I just called the president's secretary and she gave me an appointment immediately.

Q: What was the situation in the neighboring state of Mozambique? Were they undergoing the civil war that's still going on?

STEVENSON: Yes, and the refugees were beginning to come in. I saw the first of the refugees down in the south. There were also about 25,000 Jehovah's Witnesses who

had fled to Mozambique when they were being persecuted in Malawi, and had set up a huge village just across the border. When FRELIMO came to power in Mozambique, they chased them out of the country back into Malawi. I saw those poor people walking along the highway, carrying all their belongings, the little kids carrying pots and pans, camped out. I just happened to be up there by chance. This highway runs right along the border, and they were walking. I said to myself, “What the hell is going on?” All these thousands of people streaming along on foot.

So I had my driver stop the car, and he asked this intelligent-looking young woman, and she said, “We're all Jehovah's Witnesses who were living in Mozambique. We were driven out of the country.”

I said, “Ask them where they're going.”

She said, “We're trying to make our way back to our old villages.”

Of course, President Banda, the next day, had a thing released in the paper, “Anyone who gives these people succor is an enemy of the state.” Poor devils. They confiscated their bicycles. About 300 bicycles were taken from them. They were later auctioned by the police. Quite a few of them were later tried, about 2,000 of them were put in prison for two years.

I worked hard on that one and tried, as best I could. They did work out some sort of a reasonable modus vivendi just before I left, and I gather from the current ambassador that they still have some problems, but they haven't flared up like they did just before I got there, when a number of them were killed. It's never gotten that bad. I think the Jehovah's Witnesses agreed to buy Party Cards and agreed to one or two other little things, and the government said, “Okay, if you'll do that, we won't insist on you doing the other things.” But you know, they wouldn't send their kids to schools, they wouldn't salute the flag, they wouldn't buy party cards, they wouldn't sing the national anthem, these things that Banda

made so much of and the people in his new country. I've always felt that if the old man ran an open, democratic election, he'd be elected.

There was an opposition, and when he dies there's going to be some bloodletting, but right now, even now, I think he could win a free election.

Q: Did you get any instructions from Washington, or were things quiet as far as American interests were concerned? “Don't bother us and we won't bother you.”

STEVENSON: That's exactly the way it was. I had a lousy young desk officer who didn't know his ass from first base, and he was trying to run policy back on this end, and didn't know what the hell was going on. For example, on human rights, the old man had some—

Q: This is now the Carter Administration.

STEVENSON: Under Carter. Right. As you said, Malawi ran along and it functioned and there were minimal problems. They didn't have important copper like Zambia or the problems of southern Rhodesia or Mozambique. So they were pretty much just left alone and they'd let this desk officer pretty much run things. So he sent out a human rights report for us, and we were told to look at it, but that we really couldn't correct it.

The old man has some ideas—I mean, he didn't like long hair on men. He didn't want hair down below the ears on men. He wanted ladies' skirts to cover the knees. Apparently the knees are very sexy in that part of Africa. They didn't mind some deep cleavage, but they did want the knees covered. There were one or two other little things like that, and he had them all in the human rights report. I said, “This is a crock of bull. He's got every right. If this is what the society of Malawi wants, and this is African custom, if they want the dresses to cover the knees, I don't really think that's a human rights question. And they want the hair on men cut so it doesn't hang way down.”

Q: He was imposing American standards.

STEVENSON: Yes. I got Washington to take out almost everything. Then they criticized the old man for his wealth. I said, “Yes, he is very wealthy, but he hasn't stolen it. He's made it in commercial ventures. He's a big tobacco grower. He's probably used his position to get some of the land, but he hasn't stolen the land. He employs thousands of people on his tobacco estates.” It turns out that he was the world's largest single grower of flue-cured tobacco—old Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda. That's big! It's 10,000 acres of flue-cured tobacco. I said, “Look. How does that differ from a certain president we had and his TV stations down in Texas? Do you want him to follow Jesus' advice to the rich young ruler?” And they shut up on that one, too. They left about one thing in it, but they backwatered on the others.

We moved the capital city, you know, from Blantyre, which was the old place that Livingston had come to and where the first missionary— Q: This was Dr. Livingston, the explorer.

STEVENSON: David Livingston. The capital city was moved to a new capital up at Lilongwe, 220 miles to the north, while I was there, and that was kind of interesting, moving the chancery and getting set up in a new area, with a new residence and new chancery and so forth. That was an interesting experience. My wife and I enjoyed Malawi from the standpoint of living, the culture, the people, friendly people, a new culture for us, a new environment.

The old president, like I say, I could see him when I needed to, and we personally hit it off fine. I really scored brownie points with him by giving him about a pound and a half of American hybrid sweet corn seed. (Laughter) He really was appreciative for that, because they didn't have that kind. He had eaten American sweet corn when he lived in the U.S., so he missed it. At one time, on his birthday, he'd always have a big soiree, British style with a band playing in the old governor general's house and so forth, and each member of the diplomatic corps together with his wife would be taken under a fig tree to talk to the old man and his “official hostess”. So we went to talk to him. I said to myself, “What in the hell

am I going to talk to him about?" So I asked him, "Did you get so you liked American sweet corn when you lived in the U.S.?" (Because I'd begun growing it in my garden there).

"Yeah, I liked it very much!"

"How would you like some seed?"

"That would be great!" We talked some more. So I gave him some seed.

About a year later his secretary pulled me aside at a social deal and said, "Oh, that sweet corn seed that you gave to the president, the corn is so good. We like it so much."

I said, "The president likes it?"

"Oh, yes! We grow it in the Zomba garden." They had this big walled garden.

He lives like a prince. But he doesn't graft and he doesn't have Swiss bank accounts, and if his ministers and officials are dishonest, he slaps them in the pokey. I have to say there are a lot of positive things to say about the old man. I regret his cruelty. The sycophancy has changed him. I mean, he doesn't deal in reality. Like "Papa Doc" Duvalier in Haiti before he died, really believed only a silver bullet could do him in. (Laughter) President Banda is really pretty carried away. His ego won't stand any bruising. He never goes to any African meetings anymore, because his ego won't stand it.

Q: He can't stand to be with people who consider themselves his equal.

STEVENSON: That's right, or might criticize, where he'd have to defend anything. So he just avoids contact. He runs the place pretty shrewdly vis-#-vis Mozambique. He's been quite clever. I thought maybe they'd gang up and do him in. You know, they did talk about it a couple of years or so ago as was learned when that plane crashed. They found some papers or something indicating that they'd wondered if they should do something about Banda.

Q: Who wanted to?

STEVENSON: The fellow that was killed. Samora Machel had gone to Zimbabwe for a meeting and his plane crashed. Remember? And he was killed. Stemming out of that was something indicating that they'd talked about doing something.

But Banda was clever. When Frelimo first came to power in Mozambique, they destroyed the medical system. Maybe it was inevitable. At any rate, it was destroyed. Some of the ministers had health problems, and Banda sent word to them, “You're welcome to come over here. You can come over to my hospital any time.” So I think the mayor of Maputo and a minister or two came over and took treatment in Malawi hospitals. So he's been clever. Now he has an ambassador in Maputo. So the old boy plays his cards pretty well.

They used to say he was a South African puppet. Not at all. The South Africans had to treat him very carefully, and he got some help from South Africa, but it wasn't all that big. The Canadians and ourselves gave him more help than the South Africans did. The West Germans gave him a lot of help. The European Economic Community had a good program down there. The Canadians built $50 million or $70 million worth of railroad in the country. So the South African help was pretty small, but he did have relations with South Africa. He told me once that he made a state visit to South Africa and he thought he was the first black man that many of those white South Africans had ever sat down with at a dinner table, and he thought that was good. Well, I'm not saying it wasn't. It probably was good.

I have to tell you one more story about him. Just before I left, he had a big banquet in his new palace. He has this beautiful big palace in Blantyre called Sanjika Palace, cost about $12 million to build, and I think that would be the one thing I might be kind of critical of him in the way of spending money that should have gone into development. Twelve-million dollars went to build this Sanjika Palace. I think another big palace is being built in Lilongwe for him now.

Anyway, he had a reception for the Diplomatic Corps, and I was the Deputy Dean at the time. The Taiwanese Ambassador was the Dean, so I was seated next to the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress Party. He was on one side and the Dean on the other side. The Malawi Congress Party man tapped me on the shoulder and said, “His Excellency is talking to you.” The band was playing and this was a big banquet hall. With the band playing, you couldn't hear a thing. He said, “The president is talking to you.” I could see the president had leaned forward and was saying something to me. I concentrated my attention on his face. I listened and said to myself, “My God, it sounds like Latin!” Then he repeated, “Omnia Gallia en tres partes dividia est.”

I said, “Julius Caesar!”

“Aha! Aha!” I said with jovial satisfaction, “I'm re-reading my high school Latin.” And I think he's the only president in Africa that would be reading his high school Latin. Or any Latin for that matter. That's the only Latin I could remember incidentally, from my two years in High School.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you find the staff at the embassy?

STEVENSON: Good staff.

Q: This was your first look. What was your impression of the Africanists in the Foreign Service, as opposed to the Latin Americanists? Did you get much of a sampling of them in your travelings around to meetings and also your own embassy?

STEVENSON: I don't recall anything—that is any significant differences. I was impressed with the people in Africa. I went to an ambassadorial conference—well, to one early on in Lusaka, and then later in Azerbaijan. I was well impressed with my fellow colleagues and then on my own staff. My first DCM, I guess you would say, was an Africanist. He had served in the Congo, and he was good and knew his stuff. My second DCM also had some

north and central Africa experience. My last one also had had one tour. They were the key ones. The rest were pretty much junior officers who came out there.

We had a nice setup in Malawi. It was certainly a pleasant place to start as a junior officer, because you could get a shot at a lot of different jobs and you had good living conditions. We had nice housing, an acre of garden around each place. I made a point personally of planting papaya trees at each place, so everybody had their own papayas. We really lived very well.

I had inherited an Ambassadorial lodge, nothing fancy, but a rustic lodge up on top of the Zomba plateau that the AID people had leased for 25 years before Malawian independence. Since we no longer had an AID mission, we had this lodge, and everybody on the staff could use it, but the Ambassador controlled it. It was a pleasant get-away spot and a useful place to entertain people from time to time. That was at about 6,000 feet altitude, so it was very cool and the air delightfully fresh.

Then we had a cottage at the lake. All in all, Malawi was a sleeper in terms of living. It was a nice little post. In terms of substance, I was chafing before I left there. I was ready to get out and hoped I could go back to something more substantive in Latin America.

Q: What happened? "You've got your embassy and that's it"?

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: This has become more and more the pattern.

STEVENSON: The line, yeah. I was kind of given that line, and I had lost my contacts in ARA, the people who—we were talking about senior officers. Well, if there had been some senior officers left in ARA who had known my work, I might have had a little chance, but no one was left there who knew me. I had been out for six years, almost two years in personnel and then four years in Africa. That means six years away from ARA.

When I was on complement, I could see that I wasn't going to get anything. When that open-window thing came along, I said—

Q: "Open window" being a special situation where you were given special credit towards retirement credit.

STEVENSON: It was in error, actually. It was legislation that was repealed. It was in effect for two weeks. That's why it's called the open window. For two weeks you could take advantage of it. I've forgotten how many did—40 or 50 officers. You could retire on your last salary, rather than the high three.

Q: The last three years.

STEVENSON: Yes, and that made quite a difference. I was 60 years old then. At that time it was the retirement age. Q: Looking back on your career, what gave you the greatest satisfaction?

STEVENSON: In terms of jobs, there's no doubt about it, my job as DCM in Bogota was the most satisfying. It was a big, important embassy, and I had a chance to run it both as a DCM to an ambassador who wanted me to run it for two years, and then a year as Charg#. So then roughly a year when I was more the DCM. But the problems and the nature of the job, that was my most interesting assignment.

I was not unhappy in Malawi. I enjoyed that tour and, as I say, it was a new area and new people. I appreciated that opportunity, but in terms of a career, there's no doubt about it, the Bogota assignment was the high point for me.

I enjoyed all my assignments, really, except one, one in the Department. I was assigned to East-West Trade, and I thought I'd go crazy. Just bored the hell out of me.

But other than that, I really had interesting work, beginning in San Jos#, Costa Rica, where I started out as an economic officer, then I handled labor reporting, as well, and then became the consular officer and handled all the consular work.

Then Guayaquil, where we rotated around and did all the jobs. I thought Guayaquil was not going to be such a good post, but it proved to be very challenging, interesting people live in the Guayaquil area.

Then Dusseldorf was a look at Europe. For me it wasn't the high point by a long shot. I hated the climate over there. It was an interesting assignment, but I was glad to get back to Latin America.

Chile was a lot of fun, Political Counselor in Chile with the stuff that was going on there. Eduardo Frei and his campaign to win the presidency. In terms of living, Chile was the best place I lived in the Foreign Service abroad as for the climate, and the people, too, were extremely interesting and friendly.

So I enjoyed political work, but I also had, I think, a reasonably good feel for economic work, so that I never shortchanged the economic side of things. I looked at it pretty closely. All in all, I wouldn't have traded my career for anything else.

Q: You also, of course, served in personnel. A young person comes to you today and says, “Should I become a Foreign Service officer?” What would you say?

STEVENSON: Well, I think the times like I had have passed. I don't think it's going to be much fun. For one thing, just the security situation has changed so drastically. When I got in, you really felt diplomatic immunity meant something. In Costa Rica, when there were some tense times down there, with my diplomatic plate on the car, I set out and tootled right into the armed lines, once or twice, and never gave it much thought. Got a little bit scared a couple of times, but with that diplomatic plate, you had a feeling that you really

had some protection. That's changed a lot, as we know. So the security thing is really bad, and that's a very negative element now in the Foreign Service.

I have a very good friend who was DCM in El Salvador, who had always hoped to get an embassy in Latin America, and might have, because he's a good, able officer. But after he watched his ambassador in El Salvador and the way he had to live, he said he didn't want it anymore, and he left. He retired. He is now getting his Ph.D. in American archeology.

I wouldn't recommend against it. In fact, I have a granddaughter who might just consider it, and I wouldn't say no. But I don't think it's going to be as nice and interesting as the time we had.

I'm not real happy about some developments in the Service itself. I don't know what the answer is. But I'm unhappy, for example, that such things can happen—and this is a true case. A young officer in Bogota my last year there came to me and said, “I don't want to come to the luncheon on Saturday for Congressman So and So unless I get paid double-time.”

And I said, “What?”

He said, “No. Saturday, that's my off day. I don't want to come to that luncheon at the residence on Saturday unless I get double time.”

Well, I said, “You're not going to get it.” But that attitude bugs you. The old elite-corps idea that we had, you know, you did what you were asked to do and went where you were assigned. I kind of like that, too. You pretty much go where you're assigned. This whole business about bidding for jobs and so forth, I hope it's working. Maybe it is. There are problem areas in it.

But at the same time, Foreign Service Officers are much better looked after than they were in our day, in terms of education allowances and the travel and the medical care that they get and the whole works. It's a lot better than it was when we started out.

Q: It's a little more unionized.

STEVENSON: Yes.

Q: Unfortunately, that attitude creeps over into the professional work rather than just the protective side. It's also "what I'll do and what I won't do," which does impinge on the work, which in a way means that the more senior officers end up by doing more.

STEVENSON: That's right. My wife complained bitterly about that more than once when the wives were told they didn't have to do anything anymore. She had to saddle so much of the stuff herself, because some of the young wives just wouldn't help, weren't interested and wouldn't help. My wife never felt she was abused. You know this business about how ambassadors' wives demanded so much from them. I'm sure in some cases it happened, but that was a very rare thing.

Q: I can't say that I really felt this was true, but we were more of a team.

STEVENSON: Yes, and you kind of enjoyed helping out the Ambassador and his wife, pitching in and helping them. You didn't care if it was in working hours or non-working hours. There have been changes, and I'm not sure all good. I would be less enthusiastic about it now than I was. But if my granddaughter keeps showing an interest, I'll encourage her.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you very much. This has been fun.

STEVENSON: You're welcome.

End of interview